A GENTLEMAN from GASCONY

BICKNELL DUDLEY

A Gentleman from Gascony

A ROMANCE OF THE HUGUENOTS

By BICKNELL DUDLEY

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CHAPTER I.

THE LAST OF HIS RACE.

"MORDIOU, I must do it! It is the only chance left me now!"

And, with a sigh, the young Chevalier de Puycadère glanced sorrowfully up at the ancient pile before him.

There was a time once, in the days of the second Henry of blessed memory, when the château de Puycadère had haughtily upreared its castellated head, as if in proud consciousness that it was one of the most magnificent habitations in Gascony, if not in all of France.

But alas, like the noble family whose name it bore, how were its glories faded!

Its walls were crumbling, its battlements and towers almost in ruins, its windows broken and gaping—in fact, its whole appearance well-nigh disreputable save where the thick ivy had thrown a generous mantle of charity over its vanished splendor.

Of all the wide domains that had once surrounded it, like vassals about their suzerain, there now remained to the last scion of the Puycadères but a few wretched acres, uncultivated, neglected, forlorn.

Wars, confiscations, and persecutions had robbed the former and the present owner of this once fair estate of almost all their possessions. Huguenots the Puycadères had always been. Huguenots they would remain! And, with the Catholic party so long in the ascendant, their devotion to their cause had proved their worldly ruin.

Yet very dear to the eyes of their master were those impoverished lands, with their tangle of foliage, where the flowers in their crimson and purple and gold strove to throw off the choking grasp of the invading weeds, all illumined now as they were by the August sunlight, vivid, gorgeous, resplendent.

But if the château and grounds were marked with every sign of downfall and decay, so was not their owner, the last representative of his race.

In this month of August, 1572, Raoul de Puycadère was in the full flush of youth, strength, and manly beauty. His figure was lithe but muscular. A profusion of reddish-brown hair escaped from beneath his slouch hat. His complexion was bronzed, a small mustache shaded a beautifully cut mouth, full of white teeth, and his large eyes were gray, save in moments of excitement when they sparkled so fiercely that they seemed almost black.

His dress showed the decayed gentleman. His doublet and the short cloak worn jauntily over one shoulder had originally been of fine quality, but were now frayed, faded, and patched; his broad-brimmed hat with its drooping feathers showed marked signs of wind and weather, and the long boots of untanned leather which reached far above the knees could have been rendered more serviceable by a cobbler's skilful hand.

"Yes," he repeated aloud, as if apostrophizing the gray walls, "the die is cast. When I see thee again, if

ever, home of my ancestors, thou shalt receive a garb more worthy of thy dignity."

And he laughed merrily at the conceit. The hopes of youth are hard to smother. It is only in the pathway of the old that the wall of despair rises, dark and impenetrable in its strength.

The echoes of the young chevalier's laughter had scarce died away when round the house, from the weed-grown avenue that led to the stables, hobbled a little, dried-up old man, leading a horse which, with its knock-knees and its thin sides through which the ribs showed plainly, was almost as sorry a looking beast as the far-famed Rosinante itself.

"Ah! woe the day!" quavered the old man, as he caught sight of his master. "Why do you desert the old place? I shall never see you again."

"Nonsense, my good François," cried the young man cheerily, leaping down the steps three at a time. "Keep up a brave heart, old fellow. You never whimpered like this, when my father—Heaven rest his soul—and I were off to the wars in Flanders."

The old man shook his head dolefully.

"That was different! That was different! There is less danger on the battle-field than in that terrible city of Paris. It is a dragon with open jaws ready to devour all that is best in France. I know it! I know it! And," sinking his voice as if fearful of being overheard, "they hate the Huguenots there."

"Nay, nay, not so. 'Times change and we change in them,' as I learned in my classics. With Harry of Navarre in the Louvre and the husband of the king's sister, a Huguenot is as safe in Paris as he is in Gascony, aye in Béarn itself. Indeed, my good François, I am not romancing," he added, as the old man refused

to be comforted, "although you seem to think I am. Oh, yes, like all true Gascons, I can pull the long bow upon occasions. But I am telling you now only the simple truth."

"But why go at all?"

"What, and eat out my heart here, living over the past greatness of my family! What would one of my ancestors, of whom you are so fond of boasting, have said to that? No! No! Paris for me! Paris which holds my fortune!"

"Heaven grant it may!"

But old François' face, as sorrowful as that of Niobe herself, revealed that he had little hope of the realization of his devoutly expressed wish.

"Mordiou, I cannot stay chattering here!" suddenly ejaculated the chevalier. "I have many a league to traverse before nightfall. Here, François, take this," and opening a purse which he drew from the bosom of his doublet, he forced into the old man's palm, in spite of the recipient's stoutly expressed reluctance, five broad pieces of gold.

"And now, farewell, my faithful old friend! What, would you make me play the woman!" as he noted the tears streaming down the wrinkled cheeks of his trusty servitor.

He pressed the good old man to his breast, patting him encouragingly on the back. Then, leaping into the saddle, he started his steed down the avenue at a pace really quite creditable to that woebegone animal. As well as he could through the mist that clouded his sight old François watched his young master's departure, until in a turn of the highway both horse and rider vanished from his vision.

But there was neither sorrow nor foreboding in the

breast of Raoul de Puycadère, as he rode happily along through the shady lanes and past the vineyards of this garden land of France. All his dreams of the future were tinged with gold and rose-color. Enthusiastic with anticipation, he carolled forth in his fresh, young voice that old ballad of the Gascon land:

Mon aïeul était rossignol,
Ma grand'mère était hirondelle!
Ohé, le pays Gascon!
Ohé, le pays Gascon!

Nothing of note happened during the rest of the afternoon. The old horse soon tired of its little burst of spirits and could only at rare intervals be forced out of a walk.

Shortly after sunset, Raoul rode into the village of Riconde, a wretched little hamlet, consisting mostly of hovels. Inquiring of a peasant, who was making his way home bending beneath a load of faggots, he learned that the place boasted a sort of inn where possibly, the peasant was inclined to be doubtful, but *possibly* refreshment for man and beast might be obtained.

When he arrived at the spot indicated, De Puycadère discovered that it was a low, ramshackle sort of an affair with nothing inviting about it. But as he was desperately hungry and moderately tired as well, he determined to try his luck, and reining in his steed, a process almost superfluous, he began bawling lustily for the landlord.

It was some moments before any one appeared, but finally the door opened, and a woman peered forth, with blinking eyes, a woman so old that by a slight stretch of the imagination she might have been considered a contemporary of those who inhabited the ark.

"Holà, mother!" cried the chevalier briskly, "will you send some one to take charge of my horse? and have you aught to give me for supper?"

"Put your horse up yourself," croaked the old woman. "There's a shed yonder. And as for supper, perchance you can have something, if you have the wherewithal to pay for it."

"Oh! rest easy as to that!" laughed Raoul, leaping lightly to the ground.

He led his tired animal to the shed indicated by the woman, and having tethered it, he hunted about and found fodder in a corner of the building.

Having attended to the creature comforts of his horse, he gave a hasty glance about him. He noticed that there were three other horses tied in the shed, two of whom gave evidence of long and hard riding. Just outside was drawn up a goodly sized van, on the canvas sides of which was painted in sprawling letters the word *Gelosi*.

Crossing the courtyard, he entered the cabaret itself, which proved to consist of only one rather large room, with rush-strewn floor, and sparsely furnished with rough tables and benches. The light from half a dozen spluttering candles was dim, and the air was so dense with the smoke from the turf fire burning on the hearth that Raoul could see scarcely a dozen feet before him.

He managed, however, to grope his way to one of the tables, and was immediately served by the beldame with a mess of steaming porridge and a bottle of sour wine.

The fare was not very appetizing, but the chevalier was too hungry to quarrel with what was set before him, and he fell to with a will.

The cravings of the inner man appeased, he raised

his head and proceeded to take an inventory of his surroundings. His eyes had now become somewhat accustomed to the atmosphere, and he perceived for the first time that he was not the sole guest of the place.

A short distance down the room were two burly fellows with coarse, repulsive countenances, who had been staring curiously at the newcomer, but immediately averted their gaze as they became conscious that they were observed.

Just across from the table occupied by De Puycadère was seated a group of four, two men and two women. Their swarthy complexions, jet-black hair and big dark eyes, together with their fantastic garb, proclaimed their race. They evidently belonged to one of those nomadic bands of Tzigani who were on their way to Paris to pick up an occasional honest and more often still dishonest coin, attracting the public by their songs, dances, and predictions of the future.

After a few hurried words with the man who was evidently the leader of the party, one of the girls rose and modestly approached Raoul's table.

She was an exceedingly pretty creature of the dark Egyptian type, and the Orientalism of her appearance was heightened by the bizarre, brilliant colors of her dress and the band of gilded sequins which, passed about her head, dangled low over her dark forehead.

"Will the noble gentleman cross the poor Tzigana's hand?" she began, with a pretty smile. "And Mirza will tell him of the future."

De Puycadère smiled good-humoredly back, and producing his purse, proceeded to select a silver piece with which to grant the gypsy's request.

The glitter of the money caught the observation of one of the rough-looking men seated farther down the

room, and an evil, covetous look gleamed for a moment in his eyes. Turning to his companion he uttered a few low, rapid words.

Mirza was attentively examining the lines in the chevalier's hand. Suddenly, she uttered a cry and, raising her head, beckoned to her companions.

The others approached and joined in the examination, meanwhile talking volubly to one another in some strange, musical language.

"Well, am I not to know your discovery?" asked Raoul, laughing.

"Ah, monsieur," said the girl named Mirza, "'tis a strange future the lines foretell, and a happy future too, unless——" and she hesitated.

"Well, unless?"

"Unless all is brought to a sudden ending."

"A sudden ending?"

"Yes, monsieur. There is much peril in store for you. If you survive, all will be well. But, whether you survive or not is beyond the gypsy's lore to predict."

"Mordiou! With a good sword and a stout arm I'll take the risk. And now, I'll away. I've loitered too long already."

"Monsieur is not going to-night?" asked Mirza, with an anxious ring in her voice.

"By my faith, I am. I sleep in Creux to-night."

At these words, the two men at the other end of the room rose and passed hurriedly out of the cabaret. In another moment, the clatter of hoofs was heard without.

"I beg monsieur not to go to-night," insisted the Tzigana, with increased earnestness. "I—I am afraid."

"Peste! my pretty one," returned Raoul with careless confidence. "Raoul de Puycadère can take care of himself."

The girl made a gesture expressive of helplessness, but said no more.

Raoul paid his reckoning, and, after a cheery good-night to the gypsies, left the sordid inn, mounted his horse, and was soon on his way to Creux.

Night had fallen. There was no moon, and it was so dark that the poor horse, whom neither threats nor cajoleries could induce to move faster than a walk, had difficulty in picking his way.

Raoul finally ceased his efforts, and, allowing his steed to proceed at his own gait, gave himself up to reflection.

He had ridden thus slowly for perhaps an hour, when suddenly he was startled by the neighing of a horse just beyond a hedge on one side of the highway.

The next moment a heavy body alighted with a thump just behind him upon the haunches of his spiritless animal.

Before he could utter a cry or make a movement for defence, a thick cloak was flung over his head, and he was dragged from his horse, which had stopped short at the disturbance.

He felt himself in the grasp of four muscular arms, and struggled furiously to free himself, but all in vain. He was raised from his feet and dashed violently down upon the hard roadway. He felt a terrible pain dart through his temple, as his head came in contact with some unyielding object, and then he knew no more. Consciousness had left him.

CHAPTER II.

SHADOWS BEFORE.

"Corbleu! Let them sing and shout while they may! By the corns of Saint Ursula, my name is not Annibal Goujon if some of the knaves do not dance to a different tune before this day week. Oh! shout for Navarre! Ere long you'll have no tongues to cry 'Vive' to him and his beggarly crew! By sword and hilt, were I the Duke of Guise, I'd slit those same tongues now without further ado!"

And the speaker, a stout, red-faced man, with little cunning eyes like those of a ferret, half drew the heavy long sword that dangled at his side, and with an oath clashed it back again into its scabbard.

The pretty, dark-eyed little woman at his side started, and cast a half-fearful glance upon his crimson countenance. Accustomed as she was to her husband's boasting as to deeds of prowess and bloodshed in which he had been or was to be the doughty hero, there was something in his manner now which boded more than his usual bravado.

The pair were standing on the narrow platform of the hostelry known as "The Rising Sun," in the Place Royale of the village of Saint Germain. Above their heads swayed slowly in the morning breeze the sign-board—the head of the young Duke of Guise, surrounded by a sunburst, golden rays stretching in all directions.

The Rising Sun! More than one curious passer-by had of late fastened his eyes upon the sign and asked himself if there were aught of augury in the painted board.

Annibal Goujon's breast swelled like a pouter pigeon's beneath his gorgeous uniform of red and yellow. Although sergeant in the King's Musketeers, the worthy man found means to fill his purse in divers other ways. He was proprietor of the Rising Sun, and, unless rumor spoke false, did not disdain to do quite a flourishing little trade as a pawnbroker and usurer.

To be sure, Rose, his wife, was of great assistance to him in these latter enterprises. Indeed, during Annibal's enforced absences while on duty, she was the virtual mistress of the inn, and more than one golden crown flowed into its coffers more for the sake of a glance from the bright eyes and a smile from the cherry lips of the pretty proprietress than for the good cheer to be obtained within the tavern itself.

It was an animated scene the ill-matched twain gazed upon this lovely summer's morning.

The village of Saint Germain was in full festival attire.

The inns and even the private houses were filled from cellar to attic, and the streets and public squares crowded with a boisterous throng of merry-makers.

At every corner one ran across booths containing goods of every description and eatables and drinkables that *defied* description, together with bands of peripatetic comedians, acrobats, giants, dwarfs, trained animals, and Heaven knows what else besides!

In the main it was a jocund, good-natured crowd, but here and there a lowering face, an impatient gesture,

a muttered curse betokened that all were not in harmony with the general gayety.

And yet, forsooth, why should not the loyal subjects of his most Christian Majesty of France be in gay and festival mood?

A few days before, the 15th of August, 1572, had been celebrated, with great pomp and magnificence, the marriage of Marguerite de Valois, sister of Charles IX., to Henri de Bourbon, the young king of Navarre.

This union of Catholic and Huguenot had vastly surprised everybody, and given rise to much surmise in the minds of the more subtle spirits of both parties.

On the whole, however, the Huguenots rejoiced greatly and believed that an end had now come to the persecution they had suffered from for so many terrible years.

How could they think otherwise?

Had not the king openly declared: "In giving my sister Margot to Henri of Navarre, I give her to all the Protestants of the kingdom"?

Had not the venerable Admiral Coligny, the noted Huguenot, who for five or six years had been so bitterly opposed to the king, come to Paris to be present at the wedding of his beloved pupil, the young ruler of Navarre? Had not Charles himself welcomed the old man with almost filial affection?

And yet over all, to the eyes of those who had eyes to see, hovered the sinister, revengeful figure of the Duke of Guise, whom, youthful as he was, the Catholics looked up to as the chief of their party, just as the Huguenots considered Harry of Navarre to be their leader.

A little apart from the general movement and gayety in the Place Royale, drawn up beneath a blank wall, under the shadow of the picturesque eaves of the Rising

Sun, was a gypsy's van, with the word *Gelosi* painted in huge characters upon its white canvas sides.

Close to the van and out of earshot of the joyous revellers stood two men, looking on with anything but sympathy at the general merry-making. Their haughty bearing and rich attire indicated that they belonged to the nobility, as indeed was the case.

One was a man of perhaps thirty-five, of somewhat stalwart build and with jet-black hair and mustache. While his features were regular and even handsome, there was something in his expression which would have warned a student of Lavater to beware crossing his will. Supremely selfish, crushing ruthlessly all that threatened to cross his ambition, and yet knowing well at need how to veil his thoughts and purposes beneath the suavest of manners, the Vicomte Hector de Vrissac stood high at court in the graces of the king and the queen mother, Catherine de Medicis. The latter, shrewd and crafty woman that she was, believed that every man has his price, and she had long since discovered that De Vrissac could be depended on for almost any sort of work, provided his services were properly recompensed.

The Vicomte's companion was a mere youth, not more than twenty, but of a muscular figure which told of considerable strength, and a bright, handsome, winning countenance, in spite of the slight marks of dissipation which a life of careless pleasure-seeking had already imprinted upon it.

As the little red eyes of Sergeant Goujon roamed restlessly here and there about the square, they chanced to rest upon the figures of the two noblemen near the gypsy's van. And then a sudden transformation took place. Annibal drew himself up with all the puffed-up

majesty of a turkey-cock, gave his breast a resounding slap, and turning to his wife, said:

"Ah! I perceive a good friend of mine, my dear, a very good friend, the noble Vicomte de Vrissac," and his tongue seemed to roll over the title as if it had been a toothsome morsel. "One word with him, and I must away. You understand of course—although, by the beard of St. Bridget, Annibal Goujon is too long-headed to confide his secrets to a woman—how serious are the motives which compel me to absent myself from you to-day. Remember, I leave in your hands all my interests."

"And when do you return?" asked Rose, indifferently.

"I do not know," and he eyed her in a half-suspicious manner, then continuing with emphasis, "but act precisely as if I were about to return the very next instant."

Did Rose shrug her shoulders at this veiled threat? Goujon was not quite sure, not sure enough at all events to take any notice of it. So, contenting himself with what he had already said, he placed one pudgy finger beneath his wife's dimpled chin, and, bending forward, imprinted a kiss upon her lips—a salute not too well relished by the recipient, if one were to judge by the *moue* she made the moment her lord and master had turned his back.

Straight to the van strutted the portly sergeant, thoroughly convinced in his own mind that he was the observed of all observers, the envied of all enviers.

As the younger of the two noblemen caught sight of him, he burst out laughing, and, turning to his companion, began some jesting remark little flattering to the vanity of the self-satisfied sergeant had he heard it; but, fortunately for the latter's conceit, the words were cut short by a low, quick "Chut!" from De Vrissac.

Goujon advanced until he was close to their elbows, then, doffing his plumed hat, he bowed as low as his decidedly corpulent anatomy would permit.

Then, raising himself to his full height, he fixed his eyes upon De Vrissac, and, with much solemnity, uttered the one word:

"Guise!"

De Vrissac's face darkened, and he made as if to utter some sharp rejoinder, but he evidently thought better of it, for, after a quick glance about him, he replied with equal solemnity:

"Guise!"

"All!"

"All!"

"By order of the king."

"By order of the king and the great Henri."

"When strikes the clock of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois."

"At the first sound of the tocsin."

"'Tis agreed."

"'Tis agreed."

Goujon paused, with a grin of satisfaction overspreading his coarse, crafty features. The mysterious catechism, countersign, or whatever it might be, was evidently ended. The young Duke de Bassompierre—for De Vrissac's companion bore one of the proudest names in France—had listened with ever-increasing amazement to the parley between the ill-matched pair. But there was another listener, with whom it would have fared ill had his eavesdropping been discovered by the choleric De Vrissac. Crouched within the van was a young man who had eagerly drunk in every word with an amazement and bewilderment quite equal to the duke's.

After a moment's silence, De Vrissac spoke again.

"Look you, Master Goujon," he said, sternly and with little or no attempt to conceal his annoyance, "and pay strict heed to my words. Evidently, you have learned your lesson well. So far, so good! But discretion is a virtue you apparently lack. Beware how you speak again in public places. Bridle your tongue, and see that it wags no more like the clapper behind an old gossip's lips. Good-day!"

Goujon's face fell. Crestfallen, he made another low obeisance, then, turning, strode away with but a poor assumption of his former jauntiness, and was soon lost in the crowd.

"Really this is most extraordinary, my dear Hector," began the duke. "What, you, the Vicomte——"

"Tush!" interrupted De Vrissac, testily. "A few more magpies like that, and our great cause is lost."

"Our great cause?"

"Certainly. Your cause, my cause, the cause of all good Catholics, the cause of the great Henri!"

"What Henri?"

"There is only one."

"And he?"

"Henri of Guise."

De Bassompierre was silent for a moment, and then he said slowly, waving his hand toward the crowd in the Place Royale:

"To judge from this scene, one might think there was another Henri in France—Henri of Navarre."

With a smothered malediction, the vicomte laid his hand feverishly upon the jewelled hilt of the dagger he wore at his belt.

"By the mass!" he replied in a low, tense voice, "let Navarre enjoy his glory while he may. 'Twill be short-lived, I promise that."

A strange expression, half curiosity, half offence, passed over the young duke's face, and then he laid his hand, in its embroidered gauntlet, impulsively upon the other's arm.

"Hector, I am no fool, and there is some plan afoot. I can well see that. Why, as a good Catholic and a peer of France, am I kept without the confidences of our party?"

"All in good time, all in good time, my dear Paul. Your mother especially——"

"Mort de ma vie!" interrupted the young man, angrily, "I am no longer in leading-strings."

"Certainly not. I did not mean to intimate it," said De Vrissac, soothingly. "Be content. I promise you that you shall know all no later than to-night. By the way," with a sudden change of manner, "did you know that yesterday when Admiral Coligny was passing the house of Canon Piles, he was shot at?"

"Shot at? No! Was he killed?"

"No. He had his arm broken and two fingers taken off. But it is hoped the balls were poisoned."

"Hoped!"

De Vrissac deliberately faced the duke, and threw straight in the young man's eyes a look full of the deepest significance.

"Feared! Feared!" he corrected slowly. "Did I say hoped? It was a slip of the tongue."

Was it fancy, or at this moment did De Vrissac hear a muffled ejaculation which certainly did not proceed from his comrade.

However, before he could investigate, the tête-à-tête was rudely broken in upon. A party of four gypsies, closely followed by a laughing, noisy crowd, came hurriedly up to the van.

The foremost of the Tzigani, a swarthy man, with brilliant black eyes, took a flying leap to the top of the short flight of steps in front of the canvas door, and facing the tumultuous throng, raised his hand in mute appeal.

As soon as silence was partially restored, he struck an attitude, and harangued the people as follows:

"Messieurs and mesdames, lords and noble ladies. The Signor Pharos here present, the director of this incomparable troupe, thanks you. Have patience, he beseeches you, and this evening you will be well rewarded for your courtesy. A wonderful performance, unparalleled juggling, dancing such as the Bacchantes never equalled, singing to give you a foretaste of Paradise, and the marvellous comedy, 'The Chevalier who Sold his Wife to the Devil!'"

A roar of laughter greeted this, and after it had subsided the gypsy continued:

"We hope that your enlightened taste will accord us a greeting like to that we have received throughout all Italy, where we had the distinguished honor to appear before princes."

With sweeping reverences to right and left, amidst vociferous applause, the celebrated director of the Gelosi troupe descended from his perch.

As the rabble gradually melted away, he turned to one of the Tzigani near him, a strikingly handsome girl with the midnight eyes and raven hair of her race, and said:

"Mirza, I don't see the comrade which chance cast in our company."

"The poor fellow we picked up half-dead on the highway?"

"Exactly."

"He sleeps," said the girl, with a wave of her shapely brown hand toward the van.

"Then he has slept long enough. Awake him, Ismael."

"Ohé, friend, ohé!" cried the one addressed as Ismael. "Wake up! Wake up!" and seizing a padded stick, he struck a vigorous blow upon the gong which hung by the side of the van.

At the reverberation, which was fit to wake the dead, the crowd came hurrying back, fancying some entertainment to be in store for them.

"Come, Paul, come!" said De Vrissac, catching the duke by the arm. "We've had enough of this."

"One moment," pleaded De Bassompierre, whose eyes were fixed upon the gypsy girl, Mirza, with a light in them not pleasant to contemplate.

"Come, come, I say, come," insisted the vicomte. "One bottle at the Rising Sun and then for Paris!"

In spite of himself the duke was compelled to yield, and, forcing their way through the crowd, who, impressed by their dress and bearing, gave way respectfully before them, the two friends entered the cabaret.

Scarcely had they disappeared within the hospitable portals than the canvas which hung loosely over the door of the van was lifted and a young man stepped out into view.

A strange figure he presented as he stood at the top of the steps, a little dazzled by the sudden glare of sunshine. Shreds of straw ornamented his reddish-brown hair dishevelled by sleep, and the feathers of his faded hat hung bedraggled over his tattered pourpoint. Moreover, he was plastered with mud, and his clothes, shabby enough at the best, were in a woeful plight. He was buckling about his waist a sword, the hilt and scabbard

of which were of exquisite workmanship and contrasted strangely with the rest of his attire.

In spite of his garb, however, there was an indefinable charm about him, that vague something which proclaims birth and breeding, which can no more be described than can the odor of the rose and which neither poverty nor rags can ever totally efface.

Rose Goujon, who, attracted by the noise, was leaning out of one of the windows of the inn, was not far wrong when she murmured to herself:

"Ma foi! In spite of his tattered feathers and his pourpoint of the time of Henri II., he is superb!"

The newcomer finished buckling his sword-belt, and, in a dazed sort of way, as if quite unconscious of the people about him, removed his hat and ran his fingers through the masses of his hair, revealing as he did so a discolored spot just above the temple, a reminiscence apparently of some heavy blow.

"He's a queer-looking fellow," observed a young man in the cap and gown of a scholar, to another similarly attired.

"Yes," was the laughing response. "I would wager that he is the chevalier who sold his wife to the devil."

"Chut! chut! He is going to speak."

The tattered gentleman had raised his eyes to the window where Rose was, and, hat in hand, courteously addressed her:

"What are all these people doing here? Tell me, gentle lady—yes, you who have such a pretty smile. Where am I, pray?"

"At Saint Germain," responded Rose, with a slight blush.

"Saint Germain!"

In bewilderment, he slowly descended the steps and

found himself face to face with the Tzigani. Then it all flashed back upon him—the departure from home, the meeting with the gypsies, the sudden attack.

"Are you better, monsieur?" said a timid voice, that of Mirza.

"Yes, yes. So, my pretty one, part of your prophecy has already come true."

"Hélas, yes, monsieur. And had we not come along in time for Pharos and Ismael to beat off the ruffians, your plight might have been worse."

"Brave fellows!" and he grasped a hand of each of the gypsies.

The crowd had pressed closer and was standing gaping with curiosity. As Raoul de Puycadère observed this, the absurdity of the situation dawned upon him, and a sudden impulse seized him. He would satisfy their curiosity. He possessed much of the love of romancing which seems to be the birthright of every true Gascon and which has given rise to that very expressive word "gasconade." So, with a twinkle in his eye, he began:

"Mordiou! What is the meaning of all those open mouths and those noses in the air? Good people, you are surprised, are you not, to see a gentleman in such a state? Know then——"

"Listen! listen!"

"Know then," continued Raoul, half telling the truth and half drawing on his imagination—"Know then that three leagues from here I was assailed, I and my people, by a gang of scurvy scamps, who, not content with robbing me of my horses and equipages and the considerable sums contained in my coffers, after leaving me for dead at the cost of fifteen of their band dispatched by me, in a most cowardly manner took ad-

vantage of the unconsciousness caused by my loss of blood, to despoil me of the raiment proper to my rank and attire me—*attire*, Heaven save the mark!—in these sordid rags! My good friends can attest the truth of my words, if," fiercely, "there be perchance any one here who dares to doubt it!"

Apparently no one cared to take up the challenge, and after a moment's pause Raoul continued, growing more and more audacious in his statements and thoroughly enjoying the ingenuous wonder of his auditors:

"Learn that you have before you the Chevalier Raoul de Puycadère, who is gentleman enough that the king calls him his cousin—ahem! after drinking. The Chevalier de Puycadère, I say, with a magnificent château, donjons, drawbridges, moats, and towers, and a hundred vassals who fly to obey his word of command. I have come to Paris to take possession of an enormous estate to which I have fallen heir, and to salute the admiral, for I am a Huguenot."

How long this diatribe, with its strange mixture of fact and fancy, would have continued is only a matter of conjecture, for at this moment a commotion arose at the other side of the square, being caused by the arrival of a mountebank with a couple of dancing bears, and in a trice Raoul found himself deserted by his fickle auditors, eager for a new sensation. Even the gypsies followed in the wake, anxious to discover the attractions of the rival fakirs.

Left to himself, Raoul laughed and then sighed. Already he was a little ashamed of the spirit of mischief which had led him to deliver such an oration in public.

Suddenly he thrust his hand into the bosom of his doublet and as quickly withdrew it with a cry of rage.

His purse, containing all the money he had in the world, was gone!

Doubtless the footpads had had the time to filch it from him before the arrival of the gypsies. Where now, a penniless adventurer, were the rosy hopes he had set out with from Puycadère?

CHAPTER III.

GABRIELLE.

"MONSIEUR."

With a start Raoul turned to find at his elbow the rosy, smiling face of the little mistress of the inn.

The impressionable young woman had from the first view been greatly taken with the handsome face of the Gascon, and she implicitly believed every word of his rhodomontade.

With a sudden impulse she decided to befriend him. Perhaps this resolve was not wholly disinterested. There may have been lurking in her mind the idea that so noble a seigneur, with his vast fortune, magnificent castle, and hundred vassals, would not prove ungrateful in a pecuniary way for any kindness shown him in his time of need.

Pretty Rose had a long head upon her graceful shoulders.

"Monsieur," she began, "I may be bold to address you, but——"

"Go on, my dear," said Raoul encouragingly, as she hesitated. "Have no fear."

Ever ready as he was to fight or to make love, Cupid and Mars being his twin divinities, he was nothing loath to indulge in a mild flirtation with the attractive landlady.

"I scarcely know how to propose it to monsieur," continued Rose, emboldened by the chevalier's gracious

manner, "but the fact is this. All his servants having been massacred and his money stolen, monsieur may have need of temporary accommodation. If my poor inn will serve him, all that I have is at his disposal."

"But I haven't a maravedi."

"That is well understood. Monsieur can pay at his convenience."

Raoul hesitated. He felt a little spasm of shame to impose thus upon the good woman. And yet what was he to do? At that moment, a fugitive breeze brought to his nostrils a delicious whiff from the kitchen of the Rising Sun, and he realized that he was hungry, undeniably hungry. This decided him. After all, as Rose said, it was but a temporary accommodation, and his fortune once made he would repay her an hundredfold.

The spirits of the Gascon were rising, and once more he believed in his star.

So he thanked the little woman, accepted her proffered hospitality with an appropriate mixture of effusiveness and dignity, and followed her to a little table beneath an awning to the right of the entrance to the inn.

The place was screened from the observation of the passers-by by an arrangement of palms and climbing vines trained over a trellis-work; but to any one seated beneath the awning, all that went on in the Place Royale was plainly visible through the leaves.

Here Raoul threw himself down, and, while Rose bustled away to make preparations for the entertainment of her guest, lazily gave himself up to enjoying the anticipation of the good things to come.

When one is twenty-five, in perfect health, with a good sword at one's side, what matters an empty purse? It is folly to indulge in gloomy forebodings.

Vogue la galère! Let the morrow take care of itself!

Now it so happened that Rose's was not the only pair of bright eyes that had rested with approval upon the young Gascon's handsome face and graceful, manly figure.

Just prior to his appearance from the caravan, two women had entered the square from a narrow street, diagonally opposite to the Rising Sun.

The one was an elderly duenna of somewhat grim aspect, and clothed from head to foot in austere black. By her side moved, with the step of a young fawn, a girl in the first morning of her youth, an Aurora of grace and beauty. No tint of the shell in which Aphrodite arose from the foam of the sea could rival the delicate bloom on those rounded cheeks. The mutinous little mouth was as sweet as crimson roses, and like twin sapphires set in ebony the large deep-blue eyes glanced brightly amidst the dark lashes. Beneath an azure toque, ornamented by a single feather held in place by a clasp of pearls, strayed soft curls as silken and golden as the tassels of ripened corn.

A gown of blue velvet looped over a satin petticoat of a lighter shade displayed to advantage the slender, willowy figure.

The duenna held in her hands a rosary and a book of hours, and her eyes were cast down as if fearful of corruption at the sight of worldly things. But those of the young girl glanced hither and thither with as much interest and vivacity as those of a novice escaped from the convent.

"See, Dame Brigitte, see!" she murmured to her companion. "What gayety! What animation! Oh! it is charming!"

"All the more reason to make haste, mademoiselle,"

returned the duenna grimly. "Besides, the first summons to mass has sounded, and——"

"Let us wait for the second," interrupted mademoiselle, with a mischievous smile.

But there was no answering smile on the face of Dame Brigitte. On the contrary, she answered severely:

"Mademoiselle, this is no place for you."

"Oh! my place for once in a way can well be where there is some amusement. Too often it is where there is nothing but ennui. Oh! look, Dame Brigitte, look, what is going on yonder! Oh! the poor fellow! Let us hear what he is going to say!"

"Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!"

But it was evident that though the worthy duenna might command, it was beyond her power to enforce those commands, and willy nilly she was obliged to stay and listen to the speech of the unfortunate Gascon.

When this was over, it was too late for mass, and to Dame Brigitte's horror, the wilful young lady insisted upon remaining to witness the merriment in the Place Royale.

Wandering hither and thither about the square, it chanced that they paused just in front of the arbor behind which the Gascon was concealed; and, peering through the leaves, the eyes of Raoul de Puycadère rested for the first time upon the fair face that was to play so large a part in the drama of his life and be hereafter the morning-star of his destiny.

"Oh! Mademoiselle Gabrielle! Mademoiselle Gabrielle!" groaned the poor duenna.

"Gabrielle!" thought Raoul. "Gabrielle! The name of a divinity!"

"What would the duchess say?" pursued Dame Brigitte, shaking her head with direful forebodings.

"Oh! a fig for the duchess!" retorted Mademoiselle Gabrielle gayly. And then, with sudden compunction, "No, I did not mean that! The good duchess!"

"Oh! mademoiselle, you will be the death of me!"

But Gabrielle made no reply. Her attention was absorbed by the approach of a seller of little plaster images, who was surrounded by a laughing swarm of students.

"Images! Images!" the vender was crying. "Here you have them! A figure of the Wandering Jew condemned to march and never stop until the world comes to an end. A sou for the Jew! A sou! A sou!"

"Give me one!" cried one of the students.

"And me!"

"And me!"

"A Jew for me!"

"Oh! I want one!" whispered Gabrielle to her old attendant. Dame Brigitte raised her hands in terrified dismay. As soon as she could recover her breath, she protested vehemently, but in too low a tone for Raoul to hear:

"Don't think of such a thing, mademoiselle. What! you, a De Vrissac, a maid of honor to Queen Marguerite!"

Gabrielle's low, silvery laughter made music in the young chevalier's ears.

"Thank you for reminding me of that, dear Dame Brigitte," she said. "I will buy another one for the queen."

And before the astounded old woman could prevent her, she stepped forward, and, unloosing the fastenings of a dainty little purse, she cried to the peddler:

"Give me two!"

At the sound of her voice, the students turned, and in an instant the whole scene was changed.

In the twinkling of an eye, Gabrielle was surrounded.

"A dance! A dance!"

"I first, mademoiselle!"

"No, I! I!"

Gabrielle turned pale. This was more than she had bargained for, and she realized now the consequences of her folly.

Dame Brigitte, purple with anger and with dishevelled coiffe, attempted to push her way to her charge's side, screaming:

"Dance! She! A maid of honor!"

Amidst jeering laughter the old dame was hustled incontinently aside.

But deliverance was close at hand.

Whipping his sword from its scabbard, Raoul thrust aside the vines and, leaping out, confronted the youthful persecutors.

At sight of this dauntless Perseus with his stern eyes and gleaming rapier, the students—who, after all, were anything but dragons and had been impelled simply by a spirit of mischief—turned precipitately and took to their heels, their black gowns bulging out like the wings of a covey of pheasants alarmed at the approach of the hunter.

Gabrielle, white and trembling, clung close to the duenna.

Raoul sheathed his sword, doffed his hat, concealing as well as he could the sorrowful condition of its feathers, and, approaching the young girl, addressed her in his most courtly manner:

"Mademoiselle, permit a poor chevalier to hope that you have sustained no injury at the hands of those young ruffians."

Gabrielle withdrew herself from the embrace of the

duenna. The color returned in an even more vivid flush than usual to her cheeks, but the splendor of her eyes was veiled by drooping lids, as she replied modestly:

"Chevalier, accept my thanks. Without your timely aid, I shudder to think what might have happened."

"And she!" put in Dame Brigitte, still puffing from her unwonted exertions, "she, a maid of honor to the Queen of Navarre!"

Raoul started. A maid of honor!

They were standing a little in front of a balcony that jutted out from the second story of the tavern, but none of them perceived a dark-visaged man who at this moment stepped out upon the platform from one of the windows. It was the Vicomte de Vrissac, who, heated with the wine he had drunk, had left his companion to flirt with a pretty serving-maid, while he sought a breath of fresh air.

As he caught sight of the group below him, he uttered an exclamation of mingled surprise and anger.

"You are a soldier, chevalier?" ventured Gabrielle, timidly, each word being distinctly audible to the listener above.

"I was for five years in Flanders, mademoiselle, where I fought under the orders of the Prince of Lorraine."

With a gesture of rage, De Vrissac turned and disappeared through the window.

By this time, Raoul, who had been a little timorous at first, had recovered something of his native assurance.

"I heard your duenna say, mademoiselle, that you were attached to the person of the Queen of Navarre," he said, feasting his eyes upon the loveliness of the girl before him, and becoming each moment more and more

fascinated. "Would you permit me to offer you my respects at the Louvre?"

This was audacious in more senses than one, and so it seemed to strike the young lady, for an amused smile played about her lips. But she contented herself with a low courtesy and a softly murmured:

"Monsieur le Chevalier!"

"This is quite enough. Let us go," whispered Dame Brigitte, laying her hand upon the arm of her charge.

"I shall then have the honor of asking you to dance with me a pavane," said Raoul, boldly. "I——"

But he was interrupted by a harsh voice at his elbow, demanding peremptorily:

"Pardon me, but by what right, I pray, do you presume to address this lady?"

Raoul turned quickly and found himself face to face with a man who was frowning upon him in only too evident anger.

For a moment the two men eyed each other, and by one of those flashes of inspiration which come to us all at times, each recognized the other as an enemy and a stumbling-block in his path.

Then Raoul said calmly, as if not understanding the question:

"I beg your pardon?"

Before De Vrissac could speak, Gabrielle interposed.

"Hector," she said quickly, "this stranger saved us just now from much annoyance at the hands of a band of scholars."

De Vrissac frowned more darkly than ever.

"The service rendered, let him go on his way," he declared, offensively.

Raoul's eyes flashed and the blood flushed crimson

beneath his dark skin. But he managed to control his rising anger.

"And who are you to dare to speak to me thus?" he demanded with quiet dignity.

"The cousin and guardian of this lady! a man who cannot endure the Gascons. You have said just now that you fought five years under Monseigneur de Lorraine. I was a lieutenant of the prince, and I never encountered you."

"Apparently because you kept prudently in a safe place upon the heights, while I fought in the plain," was Raoul's sarcastic retort.

At this De Vrissac was beside himself with rage. He clapped his hand to the hilt of his sword, and exclaimed hoarsely:

"Those words shall cost you dear! Are you a gentleman?"

"You might as well demand of Henri de Bourbon, King of Navarre, if he were of good blood."

"On guard, then!"

Simultaneously, two swords flashed in air.

But before the steel could cross, Gabrielle sprang between, her head erect, her eyes gleaming dark with excitement.

In clear, bell-like tones rang out the command:

"Hold! Both of you! Hold!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHITE BADGE.

"Hold! Both of you! Hold!"

As if at the order of a young queen to her subjects, the would-be combatants lowered the points of their weapons.

"For shame, gentlemen, for shame!" continued the dauntless girl, the excitement kindling her cheeks and rendering her more beautiful than ever. "What, would you fight in my presence? And in this public place? And for what? A nothing? Hector, your thanks are due this gentleman for his services to me, your kinswoman, rather than your ill-timed taunts. Gentlemen, sheathe your swords!"

Instantly Raoul's blade rattled in its scabbard. The vicomte, with an ugly scowl upon his dark face, made no movement, but an imperious "Hector!" from Mademoiselle de Vrissac brought him partially to his senses, and he sulkily followed the chevalier's example.

"We shall meet again, monsieur!" he growled, with a darting look at Raoul, full of malevolence.

"Ever at your service, monsieur," was the young Gascon's quiet reply.

Although she had won the victory thus far, Mademoiselle de Vrissac had no intention of leaving the two men together. She knew too well her cousin's ungovernable temper, and she realized that her departure would be but the signal for the outbreak of fresh hostili-

ties. So she laid her hand gently upon De Vrissac's arm, and, with an entire change of manner, in a tone of cajolery which she knew well how to assume on occasion, she said softly:

"Hector, we are far from home, and, after my recent experience, I fear to go alone with Dame Brigitte. May I not claim your protection to the Hôtel de Bassompierre?"

At the sweet persuasive accents, the Vicomte's harsh face softened a trifle, and, despite himself, he was forced to yield. Moreover his fair cousin, outside of and next to his ambition, was perhaps the one thing De Vrissac really cared for.

The two moved away, followed hobblingly by the old duenna, but not before a swift, smiling glance from a pair of azure eyes had made music in Raoul's heart, telling him as it did that the donor held him blameless for the recent altercation.

When the graceful figure had vanished in one of the side streets, the chevalier sighed and passed his hand over his forehead as if awaking from a dream. As he did so, he noticed something white lying at his feet. Stooping he picked it up, and found it to be a dainty handkerchief, with the name Gabrielle embroidered in one corner. He made a movement as if to follow the owner of the pretty trifle, but, upon second thought, paused, pressed his lips to the needlework, and thrust the handkerchief into the breast of his doublet.

A maid of honor to the Queen of Navarre, whose name was Gabrielle! It was but little to go upon, and the chances were exceedingly slim for a penniless adventurer like himself to encounter her. But, although he had suffered various slight scratches from the arrows of the mischievous love-god, this was the first time, as

it would probably prove the last, that Eros had inflicted a serious wound upon the heart of Raoul de Puycadère.

There and then the chevalier registered a vow that no matter what obstacles might interpose, he would meet again the lovely maid of honor, woo her, win her if he could.

. . . . . .

The Hôtel de Bassompierre was a magnificent structure, situated on the quay, nearly opposite the Louvre and rivalling in its splendor even that historic palace itself. It formed but one of the many possessions of the Bassompierres, one of the oldest, proudest, and wealthiest families in France.

This famous family, which boasted many representatives, now dead and gone, who had distinguished themselves in church, council and upon the battle-field, was now limited to but two members,—the young Duke de Bassompierre, of whom we have caught a passing glimpse at Saint Germain, and his mother, the duchess.

The Duchess de Bassompierre, a woman of indomitable pride and a keen sense of honor which even Bayard, the knight *sans peur et sans reproche*, might have envied, had been possessed of remarkable beauty in her youth, and even now at the age of fifty, with her stately figure, her snow-white hair, and her brilliant dark eyes, there were few of the young beauties of the court who could dispute the palm with her.

And yet the duchess was far from a happy woman. Bound up, heart and soul, in her only son, living solely for him and in him, her heart was rent in twain by the young man's ever-increasing tendency toward folly and dissipation. Handsome though he was, witty, affectionate, and even honorable in a way, he was weak, undeniably, deplorably weak; and the sparkle of the wine-cup

or the soft eyes of some fair, frail damsel would scatter to the winds all his mother's injunctions and prayers.

The Bassompierres possessed but one near relative, Mademoiselle Gabrielle de Vrissac, daughter of the only sister of the duchess. Both the young lady's parents had died when she was in her early teens, and Gabrielle, who was possessed of a fair fortune, was left to the joint guardianship of her aunt and a cousin by her father's side, the Vicomte Hector. She was educated at the family château near La Rochelle, and now that her education was finished her aunt had recently brought her to Paris, and obtained for her the position of maid of honor to the Princess Marguerite, now Queen of Navarre.

There was a time when the good duchess had hoped that his cousin's extreme beauty and charm might win the young duke from his wayward courses, but this hope had long since vanished. The affection between the youthful couple was of too brotherly and sisterly a nature, the good-comradeship between them too frank and genuine, to leave any loophole for a deeper sentiment to creep in.

On the evening of the day of Gabrielle's adventure at Saint Germain, Madame de Bassompierre was seated in her favorite apartment of the hôtel, a room half boudoir, half oratory, for the duchess, as both the Bassompierres and her own family had ever been, was a devoted, almost bigoted Catholic. The furniture was rich and heavily carved, of the time of Francis I.; the walls were hung with superb tapestry, emblazoned with armorial bearings. Above the enormous fireplace hung a full-length portrait of a warrior, with a long white beard falling over his cuirass—the late duke. On one side of the room was an alcove, containing a large and

massive bed, heavily draped with curtains of dark velvet, and just opposite was a broad window opening out upon a balcony and through which could be seen the shining river and a distant view of the towers of Notre Dame.

Near the alcove stood a prie-dieu in front of a small altar surmounted by a large ivory crucifix, which gleamed with a weird whiteness in the somewhat dimly lighted room.

The duchess—a worthy occupant of the noble apartment, in her trailing robes of deep purple velvet with a Marie Stuart cap upon the snowy masses of her hair—sat in a large armchair near the fireplace where a log or two blazed fitfully upon the hearth, for the night was a trifle chilly.

Near her stood an elderly man, spare almost to attenuation, and with features which were striking in their intellectuality. And indeed Ambrose Pare, the favorite physician of the king and the queen mother, was a man of no ordinary attainments, both of head and heart. The duchess had known him from her girlhood up, and, in spite of the fact that he was a Huguenot of the strictest dye, she trusted him almost as much as she did her father confessor himself.

"Pardon me, gracious madame," the physician was saying, "if I venture the opinion that you pass too harsh a judgment upon your son." He paused and then added with emphasis: "Your *only* son." The duchess sighed, and a tear gathered slowly in the corner of her eye:

"Alas, my only son!"

"The duke is young," persisted Ambrose Pare, seeking for excuses to comfort her, "and——"

"Oh, Master Ambrose," interrupted the duchess, with an impatient gesture, "the duke his father," and

she pointed to the picture above the mantel, "the duke his father had not numbered his years ere he had drawn a sword, not in a wild brawl and drunken frolic, but with honor, under his monarch's eye, in many a stricken field."

"The fault is on the times. Youth, like the chameleon, ever takes the prevailing hue."

"His excesses!"

"For those the license of the court gives but too much excuse."

"His duels!"

"At his age the blood is hot."

"He is too turbulent, too ungoverned, too——"

But the poor woman could proceed no further. Her emotion choked her, and, with a sob, she buried her face in her handkerchief.

Ambrose Pare gazed down upon her with genuine concern depicted upon his countennce. He knew perhaps better than she to what an extent the young duke had gone in his excesses, and yet he loved the boy whose tutor he had been. He waited until the duchess had somewhat regained her composure, and then sought to console her with words, which, to do him justice, he really believed himself.

"Madame! Madame! I pray your grace to look upon these follies, for they are no more, with hopeful eyes. I am old, and in my time have seen many a noble manhood obliterate the remembrance of a wild and foolish youth. In the duke's case, believe me, the head alone is at fault and not the heart, for in the character of tutor I have probed the latter often."

The duchess dried her eyes and raised her head, meeting the old man's gaze as if she would read his inmost heart.

"You are a great physician, Master Pare," she said, earnestly, "the greatest France has known, and your skill has ere this saved the life of kings. I do entreat you then, out of the love you bore my honored husband, to spare no pains to recall to a higher, better, and nobler life my son." She rose and stretched forth her hands in appeal to the physician. "Do that, good Ambrose, and I will esteem no reward too much, even were it half the estates of Bassompierre."

Master Pare took the jewelled hands and pressed them consolingly in his.

"Madame," he replied gently, "I am a physician of the body and not of the mind, yet in this case I have studied both and I will essay the cure. My reward will be my success."

And, raising one of the duchess' hands, with the utmost respect, he touched it with his lips.

"Madame la Duchesse! Madame la Duchesse!" called a fresh and musical voice from the balcony.

"It is Gabrielle," said the duchess, quickly withdrawing her hand. "At another time, Master Pare, we will speak further of this."

Taking these words as a dismissal, as indeed they were meant to be, the old physician bowed low, and took his departure, as Gabrielle, pushing aside the curtains, appeared from the balcony.

She lightly descended the few steps that led to the window and crossed the room to the duchess' side. Dressed in a simple robe of white, in her youth and gay abandon she formed a striking contrast to the sombre-robed duchess; the one with her life all before her, the other, her existence past, save for what joy and sorrow the future might have in store for her in the life of her son.

"Aunt, there is a great commotion on the banks of the river," began Mademoiselle de Vrissac in some excitement. "Can it be some new riot that——"

The duchess pressed her hand to her heart. A riot! And Paul abroad! Ah! why must she ever forebode evil when she thinks of her son?

Alarmed at her aunt's pallor, Gabrielle feared that she was ill, and asked if she should not call back Master Pare.

"No," commanded Madame de Bassompierre, laying a detaining hand upon the girl's shoulder and with an effort recovering her composure. "It is but a momentary faintness. It will pass."

Then, seating herself in the armchair she had but recently quitted, she continued in a brighter tone:

"Sit down here, on that footstool at my feet, Gabrielle, and proceed with your story of that adventure which Master Pare interrupted."

"It was already finished," said Gabrielle, obeying, and resting her golden head against her aunt's knee.

"What did you say was the name of your preserver."

"The Chevalier de Puycadère."

"Puycadère! I think I remember that my husband had a companion at arms of that name, a brave soldier I believe, and a Gascon."

"It must have been the chevalier's father. He said that he was a Gascon, and—and a Huguenot."

The last word was spoken a little hesitatingly, for Gabrielle was well aware of the duchess' hostility to the reformed religion.

Sure enough, the face of the elder lady darkened ominously.

"A Huguenot!" she ejaculated. "Will those misguided creatures never see the error of their ways, and,

by embracing the true faith, save this unhappy land from the miseries and bloodshed into which it has been plunged?"

"Is it wholly their fault?" rejoined Mademoiselle de Vrissac, a little timidly. "Surely, the other side has been to blame also in its excesses. But, at all events, the marriage of my dear princess is an augury of happier times."

Now the marriage of a Catholic princess of the house of Valois with the Protestant Prince of Béarn, as she persisted in calling the King of Navarre, had been far from pleasing to the duchess, and Gabrielle's remarks seemed to her little short of heresy. But before she could reprove the daring girl, the door was flung quickly open and her son dashed gayly into the room.

His face was flushed and his eyes bright with wine. Both the duchess and Gabrielle rose to their feet.

Although Madame de Basssompierre's first anxious glance told her the truth, that her son had been indulging too freely, she said nothing but suffered the kiss he imprinted upon her cheek.

Then she sank back again in her chair, thinking bitterly: "The proverb is true which says when your children are young they trample upon your feet, but when they grow up they trample upon your heart!"

The duke noticed nothing, but laughing a little boisterously, he turned to Gabrielle and pinched her mischievously upon the cheek.

"So, my pretty cousin," he cried, "you would stay to see the fun at Saint Germain, would you? and got yourself rarely frightened for your pains. Oh! you need not deny it. Hector has told me the whole story."

Gabrielle's face flushed angrily.

"And I call it very unkind of Hector, very uncalled

for," she retorted, indignantly. "*He* was not present to protect me from insult."

"Oh, there will be plenty of time for him to protect you," laughed the duke, delighted at an opportunity to tease the young girl. "When he is your husband!"

"That he will never be!"

"He swears he will!"

"And *I* swear he shall *not!*" And in her exasperation, Gabrielle clenched her hands until the nails indented the pink palms.

The duchess made a movement to interrupt, but, upon second thought refrained. Her gaze was fixed anxiously upon her son. The effects of the wine the young man had imbibed at the Rising Sun and elsewhere, doubtless augmented by the heat of the room, were becoming more and more apparent. His eyes burned with a increased hectic light, and he staggered a little as he leaned back against a table.

"Time will tell," he answered, with a laugh which ended in the suspicion of a hiccough. "You did not need Hector this time at all events. You had another protector, and a worthy one, forsooth! A ragged vagabond——"

"He is no vagabond!" protested Gabrielle, hotly.

"And a Huguenot," proceeded the duke, without noticing the interruption. "A Huguenot!" he repeated, and the word seemed to inflame still further his already overheated brain. "May the devil, saving your presence, fly away with them all! Enemies to church and State, they should be ob—obliterated, root and branch! Root and branch! Ay, and so they will be, before four and twenty hours have passed over our head. Oh! Hector knows! Ask him! And I know, I know too!"

And he glanced round, as if challenging any one to deny the statement. He evidently was in that talkative mood when a drunken man scarcely knows what he is saying and cares still less.

"You will see," he went on recklessly. "To-morrow, stroke of the tocsin—Ohé! Paris will be gay at the death-dance of the heretics."

Scarce understanding, Gabrielle had retreated to a corner of the fireplace, and was listening in bewilderment to her cousin's wild words.

More astute, and presaging she knew not what disaster, the duchess, pale to the lips, rose from her chair, and advancing, laid her hand upon her son's arm.

"Paul! Paul! What are you saying?" she implored in low tense tones, "are you mad? Oh! I beseech you, if there are to be further scenes of horror, stay within doors. Remain with me!"

He threw his arm about her with maudlin tenderness.

"Have no fear, mother mine!" he declared, with difficulty. "We are all good Catholics here. All—all loyal to the king! Why shouldn't you know? Why, shou—shou— See!" recovering himself with manifest effort, and, with his disengaged hand drawing from his pocket a little bundle, which he shook out and held up, revealing a double cross formed of white linen.

"See! With—with this in my hat, and—and a white s-s-scarf on—on my arm, I am safe! As are all—all who wear them. Remember—remem—if—if——"

He could articulate no more, and his head fell forward. With an action full of infinite sorrow, full of divine tenderness, his mother drew the drooping head down upon her breast. Then she turned an agonized look upon Gabrielle. Her lips moved, but they uttered no sound.

The young girl understood. The mother would be alone with her son.

Quietly, Gabrielle made her way to her own apartment, there to lie awake half the night, dreading she knew not what, but with a clear conviction in her mind that a double white cross in the hat and a white scarf upon the arm would be, in some mysterious way, a safeguard against impending evil.

CHAPTER V.

BORROWED PLUMES.

Raoul de Puycadère moved uneasily, stretched his arms, yawned, and then opened his eyes, still heavy with sleep.

He found himself lying upon a bed in a plain but comfortably furnished room.

The curtains were drawn closely in front of the windows, shutting out every ray of light.

For a moment he could not recollect where he was, and then like a flash it all came back to him—the leaving home, the attack on the highway, the gypsies, the little landlady, and—ah! Gabrielle! He leaped to his feet and made sure that the precious handkerchief was safe. Henceforth, to work now, hands and brain! He had an object in view, an object far dearer and worthier than the mere conquering of place and fortune.

How long had he slept? He had not the slightest idea. Upon re-entering the inn after the departure of Gabrielle and her companions, Madame Goujon had served him with what to a man in his famished condition seemed a sumptuous repast, and then the good little woman had insisted upon his taking some repose, which in truth he was nothing loath to do after the rough treatment he had received from the highway robbers and the exciting events of the day.

But now he was refreshed, the bruise on his forehead had ceased throbbing, and he was quite himself again.

He hastily drew on his boots, which he had kicked

off beside the bed, plunged his face in a basin of cold water, and made his soiled and tattered clothes as decent as possible, which, with all his efforts, however, was not much to boast of.

Then going to the window he drew aside the curtain and flung open the casement, murmuring laughingly, as he did so:

"Enter, my friend the sun, and take a seat!"

And in truth it seemed as if his sunship did not disdain the invitation, for from its position low down on the horizon it flooded the modest room with a wealth of mellow rays.

The place below was very quiet now, most of the revellers having departed or retired temporarily to their various abodes for supper, and Raoul, leaning his head upon his hands, drew in long draughts of the cool evening air.

Just below him was the little arbor, through the vines of which he had first beheld the entrancing vision of—Gabrielle. Gabrielle who? Ay, that he must set himself to discover without delay. How lovely she was! How sparkling! How pure! And this jewel of great price he had sworn to make his own! And that oath he would keep, though fifty ill-tempered cousins and guardians thrust their ugly jowls between!

His roseate reflections were interrupted by a gentle tap upon the door, which, meeting at first with no response, was repeated more vigorously.

With his castles in Spain thus rudely shattered, the chevalier turned impatiently and cried out:

"Enter! Mordiou! Enter then!"

But all his resentment vanished, as the door opened, disclosing the blushing, smiling face of his kind-hearted landlady.

"Pardon the intrusion, Monsieur le Chevalier," she began, "but I thought perhaps monsieur might have awakened and might need some refreshment."

"Indeed you are too good, madame," returned Raoul, politely, "or is it mademoiselle?"

"Oh, madame," answered Rose, with a little *moue* which said as plainly as words could have done: worse luck!

"I envy your husband."

"Oh, monsieur! Is monsieur refreshed?"

"Entirely recovered, my good madame."

"Then, if monsieur will follow me."

Obediently Raoul followed his pretty conductress as she tripped along the hall and into the principal room of the cabaret, which served at once for dining-room, café, and pawnshop. There were only two or three guests in the spacious apartment, and Rose led the way to a table neatly spread with a white cloth, in an embrasure of a window looking out on the Place Royale.

She served him with her own hands, and, as she did so, chatted away gayly and unreservedly, telling him of her neighbors, her business, and her husband absent on service of the king.

"And your good husband, Monsieur Goujon," began Raoul.

"Sergeant," corrected Rose, "sergeant in the king's musketeers."

"I beg his pardon, Sergeant Goujon. Do you expect him to return soon?"

"No, no, not for some time. The saints be praised!" she added under her breath.

The chevalier laughed.

"I should be delighted to see him," he said, "and to tell him all that I owe you."

Rose made no reply to this, but her face showed that the opportunity the chevalier desired would not be one of unmixed pleasure to her.

"There, monsieur," she said, to change the subject, and waving her hand toward the table upon which was spread the best that the house afforded. "There, monsieur, I hope that will please you, though of course it is not what you have been accustomed to."

"My dear madame," returned Raoul, enthusiastically, "I assure you this is the best meal I have had for months!"

Rose stared, dumb with surprise. What! Her modest providing the best meal that this phenomenally rich seigneur had had for months!

Raoul in a moment saw his mistake, but before he could invent some explanation of his thoughtless words, Rose broke forth in a gay peal of laughter. "Monsieur is a true Gascon!" she said, between her bursts of merriment. "He cannot refrain from compliments, no matter how absurd they may be."

De Puycadère breathed freely. He was saved.

"No compliment to madame could be absurd," he replied gallantly.

"Oh, monsieur, you make me blush."

"And the blush becomes you."

The little landlady could not conceal her pleasure at the words and the look of admiration accompanying them. The handsome young Gascon had made a decided impression upon her susceptible, and, it must be confessed, somewhat fickle nature.

"Ah!" she said with a sigh, half admiration, half envy, "how fortunate monsieur is! How happy one must be, not even to be able to count his fortune!"

"Yes, yes. I enjoy that happiness," said Raoul,

drily and with perfect truth; for, not possessing a solitary sou, how could he be able to count it?

During the preceding conversation, a girl had entered the room, and, seeing Madame Goujon, had timidly approached.

"Madame Goujon."

At the sound of her name, Rose turned.

"Ah! is it you, Mirza?" she said, pleasantly enough.

"Is Sergeant Goujon at home?" asked the Tzigana, in evident embarrassment.

"The sergeant is away on duty."

"I—I wanted," faltered Mirza, glancing shyly at Raoul, who was attacking with a vim the good things before him, "but I am afraid I intrude."

De Puycadère looked up with a smile.

"A young lady so charming as yourself, Mademoiselle Mirza, can never intrude where I am," he said.

These words were by no means to Madame Goujon's liking. She was too avaricious of the chevalier's pretty speeches to share them with any one else.

"Well, speak, what do you want?" she asked a little tartly, at the same time placing herself adroitly between Raoul and the gypsy.

"I do not dare to say," murmured Mirza, lowering her eyes. "I am afraid of a refusal."

Raoul tilted back his chair, thus spoiling Rose's little ruse.

"Reassure yourself, mignonne," he said, encouragingly, "our good Madame Goujon does not know how to refuse. Come! Madame Goujon, lend this little girl your sweet holiday smile and give her the courage she lacks."

The persuasive accents quite melted Rose's temporary resentment. "What a man!" she thought to herself.

"He makes one do whatever he wants!" Then turning to the shrinking Tzigana, she asked again, but in a much milder tone than she had employed before:

"Well, what do you want?"

"Two months—three months ago—when we were here before," began Mirza, trembling betwixt hope and fear, "I left with you my pretty blue gown and my lace fichu. The sergeant lent me four livres on them, and——"

"Well?"

"Well, there is a ball this evening in the theatre, and —and my sweetheart—you know, Pharos, to whom I am to be married the day of the New Year—wants to take me there, and—and—you understand? I could not dance in my everyday dress."

"And then?" demanded Madame Goujon.

"Then?" stammered poor Mirza, coloring in confusion, "why—why——"

"Then, my dear Madame Goujon," interposed Raoul, with a smile which showed his white teeth, "here is the affair in two words: This young woman, not having the money necessary to release the famous blue gown, begs you to lend it to her upon her word, and promises to bring it back to you to-morrow, only warning you in advance if it is a trifle rumpled, it is not exactly she you must blame, but the arm of her lover."

"Oh! how well monsieur speaks!" exclaimed Mirza, admiringly, forgetting for the moment her timidity.

But Rose was not inclined to yield.

"But it is impossible!" she cried, raising her hands at the audacity of the proposal. "Without money, seigneur! What would my husband say?"

"Oh! it seems that your husband is avaricious," said Raoul, determined to gain the point for the Tzigana, who, with her companions, had been the means of suc-

coring him from the ruffians who had attacked him. "But fortunately the sin of avarice is unknown to you, my dear Madame Goujon. So what the tight-fisted husband would refuse, his charming little wife will grant at once. Eh? Yes? Will she not?"

The appealing smile which accompanied these words was too much for Rose's scruples. She laughingly assented, and moved away toward a large armoire in one corner of the room, where were stored pledges of every description.

The Tzigana caught Raoul's hand, and before he could prevent her raised it gratefully to her lips. Then she hurried after Madame Goujon to obtain her treasures, her brown face beaming with the anticipated delights of the ball.

His appetite appeased, Raoul poured out a final glass of the excellent wine his kind hostess had set before him, and with that sense of well-being which a good dinner bestows upon every one, leaned back in his chair, and gazed absently out upon the square.

It was already dusk, and lights were beginning to tremble here and there in the gloaming.

Suddenly, Raoul's ears were saluted by the tinkle of mandolins, and then, in musical male voices, rang out the words of the song he knew so well:

"Non loin du pays de Gascogne,
Mon père avait un vieux château,
Fièrement se doublant dans l'eau,
Dans l'eau verte de la Dordogne,
Un soir d'été j'ai pris mon vol,
Et j'ai fui la sombre tourelle!
Mon aïeul était rossignol,
Ma grandmère était hirondelle!

Raoul had leaped to his feet and was leaning out over

the balcony. The song of his own sunny province, the very song he had sung himself as he rode away from the dismantled château of his ancestors! These singers must be his countrymen. He started to hail them, and then drew back at the sudden thought of his impoverished condition. He had not a maravédi to offer them a glass of wine.

"They sing well," said a voice at his elbow, and turning with a start he saw Madame Goujon, who had approached noiselessly during the music.

"It is a song of my own country," he answered. "They are Gascons! Ah! what would I not give to press their honest hands!"

"And why not?"

The chevalier did not answer. A shadow passed over his face, which quick-witted Rose was not slow to seize and understand the meaning of.

"Bid them in, Monsieur le Chevalier," she said, hurriedly. "I will order the wine for their entertainment. Oh! let monsieur have no scruple," she added, as Raoul hesitated. "Monsieur will repay me. I am not so avaricious as my husband!"

Although his conscience pricked him considerably for the deception he was practising, after a moment's thought the chevalier decided to follow Madame Goujon's suggestion, and signalled the singers to come up. After all, in the prosperous days Dame Fortune assuredly had in store for him, the little woman would not suffer for her present kindness.

In a very few minutes the band of singers entered the room, and instantly Raoul was among them, pressing their hands with all a Gascon's enthusiasm.

"Enter! enter! my good friends, my dear comrades! I am Raoul de Puycadère, Puycadère the Gascon, your

compatriot! Let me look at you! Let me hear your voices again in the echoes of that dear southern land whose memory will never be effaced from my heart!"

Once more the sweet melody stirred the air:

"Mon aïeul était rossignol,
Ma grandmère était hirondelle!"

During the song, Madame Rose had caused a plentiful supply of wine to be brought, and at the conclusion she filled the glasses of the chevalier and his countrymen.

"Now," cried Raoul gayly, raising his glass high in air, "we are going to drink to the fatherland!"

"To the fatherland!"

"Salute! lofty mountains! deep ravines! old castle that was the cradle of my infancy! Salute also to the dear sun! the clearest, the brightest, the most radiant of all suns! Gascony! I salute thee and I drink to thee!"

"To thee, Gascony!" cried the minstrels in unison, and the toast was drunk amid the wildest enthusiasm.

As soon as the clamor had subsided, Raoul fell into conversation with the young men and discovered that they were mostly students who had travelled on foot to Paris, earning their board and lodging by their music, and, after witnessing the royal marriage, which took place on a platform erected in front of Notre Dame, were now returning home. The name of Puycadère was too celebrated throughout Gascony not to be familiar to many of them, but fortunately they made no allusion to the impoverished condition of the present representative of the family.

"To-morrow is to be a gala day at the Louvre," remarked one of the minstrels, "all the provinces send

ambassadors to congratulate the king and queen of Navarre upon their union."

"And Gascony of course among them," observed the chevalier, idly.

"Alas, no!"

"What, no! Gascony not represented! How comes that?"

"Monsieur Altemarre was selected to offer our congratulations, but scarcely had he arrived in Paris when he was stricken with a fever, and lies now at death's door."

"And there is no one to take his place?"

"No one."

Amid the chorus of regrets at the untoward circumstance, Raoul was silent. An idea had entered his head, an idea so daring that his pulses almost stopped throbbing at the very contemplation of it.

The revelry, mingled with the sweet Gascon songs, continued for some time longer, but finally the minstrels were forced to take leave of their host and continue their journey. "Take my embraces to our dear country," said Raoul, as he bade farewell to them, "and tell her that I shall see her soon again perhaps, and that, at all events, I will try not to end like the Gascon of the ballad, with a rapier through my breast. Adieu, comrades, adieu! and may the God of our fathers have ye in his keeping!"

After the departure of the minstrels, the chevalier fell into a deep train of thought, from which he was aroused by Madame Rose, saying in a tone of sympathy:

"Your compatriots have deprived you of your spirits, chevalier. You are regretting the South."

"No, madame, it is not that. But it makes me sick at heart to think that on the morrow one of Navarre's

own provinces should have no congratulations to offer its king."

"Pouf! that is easily remedied."

Raoul started, an eager question in his eyes.

"Monsieur will pardon the liberty."

"Yes! yes! Go on!"

"Then, why need the illness of the poor gentleman matter? Who so fit to act as ambassador for Gascony as the most noble Chevalier de Puycadère himself."

His own thought! But how impossible of accomplishment!

"Who so fit, indeed?" he answered, designating his attire with a sarcastic gesture. "In this array the most noble Chevalier de Puycadère would make a worthy appearance at the Louvre."

Rose twisted a corner of her apron nervously between her fingers. She had a proposition to make, but what would this enormously rich gentleman think of it?

"If monsieur wishes," she began timidly, "that question is easily disposed of. In the armoire yonder I have garments which would just fit monsieur. And it would rejoice me to lend them to him for so worthy an object."

Raoul was not long in deciding. Nothing venture, nothing win, must be his motto at this stage of the game. So he accepted Madame Rose's offer with words so warm in their appreciation of her kindness that the little landlady's cheeks were dyed crimson with pleasure.

Half an hour afterward the chevalier surveyed himself with proud gratification in the mirror which hung above the mantel in his room. And indeed a most attractive picture he made in a gray doublet embroidered with silver, boots of black leather, and a handsome violet velvet cloak thrown gracefully over one shoulder.

The die was cast! With eyes flashing with excitement and heart beating high with hope, he cried exultantly:

"Gabrielle, the promise shall be kept! To-morrow I enter the Louvre!"

CHAPTER VI.

A DANGEROUS GAME.

THERE was a brilliant fête in progress at the Louvre, the culmination of all the festivities in honor of the royal marriage.

On this eve of the Feast of St. Bartholomew, the countless windows of the historic palace were brilliantly illuminated. The neighboring streets, usually so quiet after the bell of the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois had sounded the hour of nine, were now filled with a jostling, tumultuous crowd, through which the coachmen and link-boys found difficulty in forcing their way. It seemed as if the residents of Paris and the thousands of Huguenot visitors with which the fair city was thronged from end to end were bent this evening on making the Louvre their objective point.

There was much scope for wondering reflection in the sight of the leaders of the two parties, who had so lately been at one another's throats, now entering the palace side by side in apparent amity. The rabble on both sides were not so ready to bury the hatchet, as the sharp words that passed here and there in the crowd abundantly testified. There was little recourse to anything more than words, however, as the Huguenots were too genuinely rejoiced at what looked like the dawning of a new era and the end of persecution to care to precipitate fresh dissensions, and the Catholics, although the majority of them were secretly dissatisfied and won-

dered how their chief the Duke of Guise could so easily forgive Admiral Coligny, whom he had always accused of instigating the assassination of his father, Duke François, were bound to follow as much as possible the example of their superiors.

Perhaps there would have been less wonderment and a far less degree of dissatisfaction amidst the rank and file of the Catholic party, could it have had knowledge of a scene which took place that very afternoon in one of the apartments of the Louvre, a scene participated in by King Charles himself, Catherine de Medicis the queen mother, who possessed ten times the courage of her weak and vacillating son, and the Duke of Guise.

The king, white with terror,—apprehension, suspense, and doubt making him tremble in every limb,—was pacing nervously to and fro.

And indeed there was good reason for his discomfort in the astounding and terrible proposition that had just been made to him—nothing less indeed than a wholesale massacre of the Huguenots.

The plot had already been planned in all its details by the Duke de Guise and the queen-mother, and all the arrangements carried out by the duke. Three o'clock in the morning of the feast of St. Bartholomew, when most people would be sleeping in their beds, was the time fixed for the beginning of the slaughter.

It was arranged that the signal should be a pistol-shot, to be answered by a note from the deep-throated bell of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois.

Then, from hiding-places already fixed upon, the soldiers were to spring forth and do their deadly and cowardly work.

Such people who were not Huguenots were to be secretly warned to wear marks of distinction consisting

of a white linen band on their arms and a white cross on their caps.

But one thing now remained, and that was to unfold the plan to the king, who had hitherto been kept in ignorance of it, and to prevail upon him to sign the order for the scene of butchery.

This proved to be not so easy a task as had been hoped for, although both the duke and the queen-mother were confident of ultimate victory.

Shocked as the king was at the first intimation of what was proposed, his weak brain was gradually being impressed by the specious arguments set before him.

He tottered rather than walked about the room, now upholding the prepared massacre, now condemning it—swearing by all that was holy that the Huguenots had never been his enemies, but always his best friends.

Catherine de Medicis, through it all, remained as determined and imperturbable as the wife of the Scotch thane when tempting her hesitating husband to the murder of Duncan.

"It is too late to turn back," she said, with cold deliberation. "The rotten limb must be torn from the tree. If you hesitate now, the chance of ridding France of its enemies, of which Admiral Coligny is the chief, will be forever lost."

"Believe me, sire, this trumped-up peace will never last," added the Duke of Guise. "The two parties can never be reconciled. One or the other must go to the wall. War is inevitable. Better to win a battle in Paris, where we hold the Huguenot leaders in our power, than put it to hazard in the field."

Charles sank into a chair, groaning and burying his perspiring face in his hands. The two conspirators redoubled their arguments After a struggle of more

than an hour, the king, wrought to a still more violent state of agitation, yet hesitated, when the queen-mother, fearing lest, if there were further delay, all would be discovered, exclaimed in a burst of fury, partially real, partially, for a purpose, assumed:

"Since you forsake your duty, permit me, sire, to retire to some other part of the kingdom!"

Goaded to desperation, and thoroughly alarmed at this threat, for he was as dependent as a child upon his mother, Charles leaped from his chair and clutched at the order which lay upon a table near at hand.

"By God's death!" he shrieked hoarsely, "since you think proper to kill the admiral, I consent! But all the Huguenots in Paris as well, in order that there remain not one to reproach me afterward!" And with a feverish hand he signed the fatal document. "Give your orders at once!"

Uttering an exultant cry, young Guise seized the paper and, with scant ceremony, dashed out of the room.

No sooner had he disappeared than the king began to rave and tear his hair like a madman. But it was too late now. The fate of Admiral Coligny and of thousands of others with him was already sealed.

Save to the chosen few, all this was as yet unknown in Paris, and no one was more ignorant of the approaching nights and days of terror than Raoul de Puycadère, as on his audacious mission he with difficulty threaded his way amidst the multitude in front of the Louvre.

At last he managed to reach the entrance, where he was challenged by a guard who wore the uniform of the king's musketeers.

"I am the ambassador from Gascony," said Raoul boldly.

The guard gave him a look of scrutiny, and then, im-

pressed by the richness of his dress and the confidence of his bearing, allowed him to pass.

With pulses beating far more quickly than usual Raoul followed three young men, in sumptuous attire, up the broad marble staircase and along a brilliantly lighted corridor, until he came to a wide doorway screened by curtains of violet velvet embroidered with silver fleurs-de-lis.

Through this doorway the three young men, who were a few paces in front of him, disappeared.

Raoul hesitated a moment, and then, drawing a quick breath and uprearing his head haughtily, he thrust aside the curtain.

What a scene met his eyes!

The magnificent apartment, with its elaborate decorations of white and gold, was illuminated with thousands of candles in enormous chandeliers of Venetian glass suspended from the ceiling and in sconces ranged at intervals along the wall. Over the floor inlaid in intricate patterns of rare and costly woods, moved an ever-changing kaleidoscope of exquisite colors, the sheen of silk and satin and the gleam of jewels.

For an instant Raoul was dazed, and then he was roused by the voice of a page, demanding his name and titles. Instantly he recovered his self-possession and answered in a firm voice:

"The Chevalier Raoul de Puycadère, ambassador from Gascony."

As the page repeated these words, the three young men, who had preceded the young Gascon, started, faced about, and turned their eyes wonderingly upon his soi-disant Excellency.

Then they hurriedly exchanged a few words. Raoul caught two sentences.

"It is not he!"

"Ma foi, no! He is at the point of death."

Here was danger in the very beginning. These young men evidently knew the real ambassador, and were the deception discovered before he could present himself to the King of Navarre, the audacious chevalier stood an excellent chance of being summarily ejected from the presence chamber.

The young men were apparently about to address him, but before he could formulate a plan of procedure a fortunate interruption took place.

A slender, graceful figure stepped hastily toward him, and Raoul looked once more upon that radiant face which had haunted his vision, sleeping and waking, for the past twenty-four hours.

Her robe of white satin revealed the charming contours of her snowy neck and rounded arms, and the masses of her golden hair were piled high above her forehead and adorned with a chaplet of pearls. Raoul caught his breath and, forgetting all else, eagerly drank in her exquisite beauty until the violet orbs fell beneath the passionate ardor of his gaze. Then, remembering himself, he murmured:

"I have kept my promise."

She smiled a little and answered gently:

"I was not mistaken. It is really you."

"Really I."

"But how did you manage to obtain an entrance?"

These words recalled to Raoul the danger of his position, and forced him to realize that this was no moment for soft dalliance. After a quick glance at the group of three, who were apparently waiting an opportunity to address him, he moved a step nearer to the one he knew as yet only as Gabrielle, and said hurriedly, in a low voice:

"Mademoiselle, I am in peril here. But you can aid to save me."

"I!" she faltered, overcome with astonishment.

"Yes. I beseech you, ask no explanation. Deign only to be my pilot on this sea which I navigate for the first time."

"I—I don't understand."

"Don't try to understand, for the present. Do you see those three men standing near the doorway? That gentleman on the left, the one with the long nose—who is he?"

"M. de Châteauneuf."

"And his chief quality?"

Despite Mademoiselle de Vrissac's amazement and curiosity, she could not refrain from a little laugh.

"Why, he—he is always in love."

"I understand. I know his type by heart. And that one with the fierce mustache?"

"M. de Montgiron."

"A soldier?"

"Yes, talking always of the battle of Mons."

"Because he was never there. Exactly. And that other with the melancholy eyes?"

"M. de Brantôme, a writer."

"Thanks, mademoiselle. Forgive me, you shall understand all, *all*, before the evening is over."

And with a low bow and a last look, which brought the blushes to her cheeks, he turned and moved away in the direction of the group they had been discussing, leaving the young lady completely mystified and, it must be confessed, a trifle piqued as well.

As he approached the young men, one of them advanced a little and addressed him first:

"Pardon, monsieur, but we take a keen interest in you."

"Indeed," returned Raoul, with an affectation of indifference.

"Yes. The fact is, the ambassador from Gascony is well known to us, and you are not he."

"Mordiou!" and Raoul laughed as though intensely amused. "I am not surprised at your—shall I say suspicion—but Monsieur Altemarre is an old friend of my family, and, hearing that I was in Paris, sent for me and begged me to take his place, in order that his unfortunate illness should not prevent Gascony offering her congratulations to her king."

The expression of the young man changed. Seemingly he was a little in doubt still, however, and Raoul hastened to remove his suspicions entirely.

"I trust you do not doubt me, Monsieur de Châteauneuf," he continued, with a slight emphasis upon the name.

"What, I have the honor of being known to your excellency!" exclaimed the other, in surprise.

"Yes, monsieur," said De Puycadère, lowering his voice a little. "I have been in Paris only three days, and yet twenty pretty mouths have recounted to me the story of your successes in the lists of love."

De Châteauneuf lowered his eyes in mock modesty and ejaculated a low "Oh! monsieur!" And then he added with a low bow and a fatuous smile:

"Your excellency is evidently a person of discernment."

The chevalier thought to himself with satisfaction: "One supporter gained!" Then, turning to another of the gentlemen, he addressed him with somewhat exaggerated respect:

"Monsieur de Montgiron, a kinsman of mine had the honor of fighting at your side in the battle of Mons."

"Really!"

"A battle of giants! for, although victory was for an instant in doubt, genius and courage held till the last instant the sheaf of flags, one of which, they tell me, was all crimson with your blood."

However open to doubt this statement may have been, the bright flush of pleasure which dyed the doughty warrior's cheek was undeniable.

"Your excellency," he stammered.

"Two!" thought the chevalier. But there was still one more to be placated.

"Ah, Monsieur de Brantôme, permit the Chevalier de Puycadère to express to you the pleasure he feels at this meeting. Your works are well known in Gascony, and I congratulate you on the stir they have made there."

"You overwhelm me, Monsieur le Chevalier," murmured the author, as he reflected, "Really, these Gascons are charming."

"Three!"

But, successful as he had been thus far, Raoul had only passed the outposts. The real danger was yet to be faced, and that too without delay. Already bearing down upon him was an old man, glittering with jewelled orders, as stiff as a pikestaff and thin almost to emaciation.

Presaging his peril, the young Gascon whispered to De Brantôme, who happened to be standing next him:

"Who is this person?"

"Count d'Avreux, grand master of ceremonies."

With difficulty, the chevalier repressed a startled "Mordiou!" The count was already bending his long

body before him with elaborate courtesy, and in another moment had addressed him in a thin, monotonous voice:

"Pardon, a thousand times pardon, your excellency, but for many years has been incumbent upon me the honorable and delicate mission of exacting at the Louvre the fulfilment of the immutable laws of etiquette." He paused a moment to take breath, while Raoul wondered uneasily what this long preamble might forebode. "And I recognize to my confusion that a very grave infringement has been committed in respect to you!"

"An infringement!" muttered the self-styled ambassador with a qualm of uneasiness.

"Yes, monsieur, and I must beg your excellency without delay to furnish me with——"

"Well?"

"Your letters of credit."

Audacity must be the cue now, and again audacity, and still again audacity.

"Oh, very well, very well, monsieur," replied Raoul, with an assumption of easy carelessness. "We Gascons do not insist to such a point upon all little details of etiquette. I excuse your forgetfulness. Let us speak no more of it."

The dignified master of ceremonies started as if he had been shot.

"Speak no more of it!" he exclaimed, in boundless surprise and indignation. "Speak no more of it!"

"Certainly not, my dear count," was the cool reply. "My instructions are to present my letter and offer Gascony's congratulations to their Majesties in person. Mordiou, kindly conduct me into the presence without more ado."

For an instant the count hesitated, and then impressed by the young man's lordly air, he concluded it wisest to yield and answered briefly:

"Follow me!"

Immediately after his conductor, who proceeded with slow and stately step, Raoul threaded the mazes of the brilliantly attired throng, until he found himself at the foot of a dais, and realized that he was before the royal couple, and, like a desperate gambler, prepared himself for the cast of the die, which was to make him or mar him beyond repair.

At this time, Henri of Navarre, afterward the pride and glory of all France, whose very name was destined to be a watchword through succeeding generations, was barely twenty—a young man with a keen eye, black hair cut very close, thick eyebrows, a nose curved like an eagle's, and a growing mustache and beard.

His bride, Marguerite de Valois, or, as she was more familiarly known, Queen Margot, was "the pearl of the crown of France," and, indeed, in beauty and accomplishments there were few in that court of lovely and brilliant women who could vie with her. She had raven hair and a brilliant complexion, red lips, a graceful neck, and a somewhat full but still exquisite figure.

To look at her was enough to silence the scandalous rumors, rife at court, that the young husband was not too desperately in love with his beautiful bride, however much credit might be given to that other rumor that the consent of the lovely princess had been given only after long resistance on her part. Indeed there were those who stated, and with authority, that at the nuptial ceremony, when asked if she consented, Marguerite appeared to hesitate for a moment; but her brother the

king put his hand a little roughly on her head and made her lower it in token of assent.

However this may be, upon the night of the reception of the Louvre the two appeared to be on the most excellent terms with one another. Marguerite was gracious and smiling, and her kingly husband was cordiality itself.

Raoul bowed his knee before his sovereigns with many an inward tremor. It was only by the exercise of a powerful will that he kept himself from turning tail and incontinently running away, and more than once he longed for the floor to open and swallow him up.

And yet, in spite of all his trouble, he realized dimly that standing at the side of the queen was a golden-haired figure in robes of shimmering white.

As to one speaking a long distance away, he listened to the high-pitched voice of the old master of ceremonies, addressing the king:

"May it please your Majesty, I have the honor to present his excellency the ambassador from Gascony. He insists on giving into your Majesty's own hand his letters of credit, and, although it is contrary to all established rules of etiquette, I beg grace of your most high, most mighty, most merciful, most gracious——"

"And most weary," curtly interrupted Henri, who had a hatred of long speeches and pompous orations.

The count retired in confusion, while the young queen raised a fan to her lips to conceal the smile which she could not wholly repress.

Suddenly Raoul became aware that the king was speaking to him:

"Your credentials, young sir!"

With a gulp and turning ghastly pale, the chevalier

drew from beneath his doublet a paper he had previously prepared and laid it in the king's outstretched hand.

Henri unfolded it, and this is what he read:

"The Chevalier Raoul de Puycadère humbly craves pardon for the stratagem he has practised to gain his Majesty's ear, and begs his Majesty to bestow upon him such position where himself and his sword may prove their devotion to their king."

The king of Navarre could scarce believe his eyes. Twice he perused the extraordinary document; then his brow grew black as night, and, smiting the paper fiercely with his hand, he exclaimed passionately:

"Art mad? Ventre Saint Gris! Dost think Harry of Navarre can be tricked with impunity?"

CHAPTER VII.

FROM FAILURE—SUCCESS.

All was over!

Raoul de Puycadère knew that he had staked and lost. More than this, his present condition was worse, far worse than his former.

He trembled from hand to foot; his recreant tongue clove to the roof of his mouth and refused to utter a syllable.

Lucky for him was it that there were others to plead for him.

While the king was engaged in deciphering the sense of the audacious paper, Mademoiselle de Vrissac found opportunity to whisper imploringly in the queen's ear: "Madame, it is he, my preserver, masquerading as an ambassador from Gascony."

Now, Gabrielle de Vrissac was decidedly Marguerite's favorite maid of honor, and the queen's kindness had inspired in the young girl a confidence which she gave to no one else, not even to her aunt; dearly as she loved the latter, there was a little fear mingled with her affection. So she had already told the queen the whole story of her adventure at Saint Germain, and now, at the eager pleading words, Marguerite, always interested in a love affair and whose divination of such things was as keen as a hound's scent for game, immediately guessed that her favorite was more than ordinarily in-

terested in the handsome stranger, and resolved upon the spot to become his champion.

Before her angry husband could utter anything further, she laid one white hand upon his arm.

"Sire, two words in private."

The king's face softened, and he made a gesture to the courtiers surrounding them to retire, a command which was instantly obeyed.

Only Raoul remained standing with his eyes glued to the floor, anticipating he knew not what dire punishment to fall upon him.

"Well, Margot?" said the king.

"May I not see this gentleman's credentials?"

Silently the king handed her the paper.

As she read it, she broke out into a merry laugh, and at the sound Henri's stern features relaxed in a smile.

"Ah, sire, le pauvre diable! Surely his offence is not beyond pardon. And so daring a man would be equally so in your service."

"But——" began the king.

"No buts," interrupted Marguerite, with a bewitching smile. "What, after our compact, will you refuse me the first request I make of you?"

At the words "our compact," the king's mind reverted to a scene which had taken place between them two days before, in which Marguerite had thrown herself upon his forbearance and frankly avowed that on her part there was no love for the man she had married and that she looked upon their union simply as a political alliance.

Although the heart of Henri himself was at first not too deeply affected, he could not but feel a little piqued at this avowal, and perhaps it was the beginning of the love he afterward gave his wife. Just at the moment,

however, he was too conscious of the benefits accruing to himself from his marriage to show too keenly his displeasure. So, after a slight hesitation, he had answered:

"I will not ask you to love me, but, if you will be my ally, I could brave anything; but with you as my enemy, I am lost."

"Oh, your enemy? Never, sire!"

"But my ally?"

"Most assuredly."

And so, between husband and wife, was formed a frank and loyal alliance.

As Henri remembered this he felt that she was right; that he could not refuse the first request of this beautiful creature, whom, moreover, he was beginning to find adorable. But, just as his lips framed themselves to give consent, a quick suspicion flashed across his brain, and he glanced a little frowningly at the bent head of the chevalier and then at his wife. Was this man, for whom she pleaded, perchance her lover?

But no sooner was the suspicion formed than Marguerite, quick-witted as she was, guessed what was passing in his mind, and, advancing a step closer, she whispered a few words in his ear.

As by magic, the king's countenance cleared, and he turned his gaze in the direction of Mademoiselle de Vrissac, who at a little distance was watching the interview with parted lips and eager eyes.

"Ventre Saint Gris!" he said, with a low laugh. "Lies the wind in that quarter? Well, have it your own way. What shall his punishment be?"

"Make him one of your equerries."

"Eh! But you go far! Bien, so be it! Monsieur le Chevalier," he continued, turning to Raoul, "at the

queen's intercession, you are pardoned. And, at her request, I appoint you my equerry. Your duties begin on the morrow."

Scarce believing his senses, Raoul sank on one knee. It was as if Paradise had opened before one who had already felt the pangs of the place of torture.

"Rise, monsieur, rise," said the gentle voice of the queen.

The chevalier obeyed, the color returning to his cheeks and the light to his eyes.

"Ah, madame," he faltered, "I am forever prostate at the feet of your merciful Majesty. It is only now, madame, that I comprehend the extent of my audacity."

Marguerite smiled.

"In truth, chevalier," she said, kindly, "you must have had a very powerful motive to make the Queen of Navarre your accomplice in such a comedy. And I think I guess it." She motioned Gabrielle, who was blushing like a rose, to approach. "Reserve your thanks for Mademoiselle de Vrissac, for all your good fortune is due to her."

Raoul de Puycadère never knew how he managed to take leave of the royal couple. Half dazed, he found himself walking by the side of the maid of honor through the magnificent apartment. He took no notice of the curious looks cast at him. But two thoughts occupied his mind. His object was accomplished: he was equerry to the king of Navarre; and from the queen's mouth he knew that he owed his success to the woman he loved, to Mademoiselle de Vrissac (at last he knew her name).

Gabrielle, guessing something of the tumult that raged within his breast, led the way to the deep em-

brasure of a window, where there was a broad seat, screened by heavy curtains which fell from the ceiling to the floor.

Seating herself here, she motioned the new equerry to a place by her side, an invitation Raoul was nothing loath to accept.

By this time he had recovered much of his customary equilibrium, and his first words were an outpouring of thanks for the service she had rendered him, an outburst which Gabrielle gently checked. "Indeed, it was nothing," she said. "I beg you to speak no more."

"But I must."

"Then if you must speak," she answered, with a laugh and glance from beneath her heavily fringed eyelids which set the young man's heart on fire, "tell me of yourself, chevalier, of your past, of your hopes——"

"My past does not exist, mademoiselle," interrupted Raoul, eagerly. "As for my hopes, my ambitions, they are so great, so foolish that my heart would scarce dare to say them to my reason."

The violet eyes were lowered now, the fair head was bent, and a faint blush tinged the perfect oval of the cheek half turned away from Raoul.

"I—I do not understand, monsieur."

"May I make you understand?"

But to the eager question there was no answer. Gently, timidly he took one of the little hands that lay idly in her lap. She did not draw it away.

Emboldened, Raoul continued in a voice low, but thrilling with passion:

"Would you know the one hope of my life, the star on which my envious gaze is fixed? 'Tis you, Gabrielle, you! You whom I loved the first moment I saw you,

you whom I shall love till eternity. Is there no word of hope for me? No word to tell me that some day, perhaps, my love will end by touching your heart?"

"Would such a hope render you happy?"

"Ah! so happy that, through gratitude, I should go straight on high to thank the saints in Paradise!"

A lovely smile played about the exquisite lips as they murmured in tones so low that Raoul had to bend his head close to catch the words:

"Go, then. The road is open!"

With a cry Raoul caught her in his arms, close to his heart, and for a moment the two were forgetful of all else in that supreme happiness which comes only to lovers in this workaday world.

Gabrielle was the first to recover herself. Remembering the semi-public place in which they were, she gently withdrew herself from her lover's embrace.

"You love me?" murmured Raoul, half beside himself with joy. "Me? Is it possible, a poor chevalier without a possession in the world save his sword?"

Gabrielle turned upon him a look of amazement.

"What! nothing in the world save your sword! But the ancient domain of Puycadère with its dozen towers——"

Raoul's heart sank, and a horrible feeling of shame and embarrassment took possession of him. Curses on his glib tongue that had got him into this awkward predicament! It was laggard enough now, however, for he could only stammer out some incoherent words. Seeing his confusion, Gabrielle's lips twitched. She longed to laugh outright. She was certain now of the truth, which, as a matter of fact, she had strongly suspected before. Poor fellow! And yet an irresistible spirit of mischief seized her, and she could not resist

the impulse to torment him, and at the same time perhaps to teach his Gascon tongue a lesson.

Where is the woman yet who, *sure of her power*, bien entendu, does not take a keen delight in tantalizing the man she loves?

"Do you know I long to see Gascony!" proceeded Mademoiselle de Vrissac, watching out of the corner of her eye the luckless chevalier, who was on pins and needles at her every word. "Gascony which contains your splendid estate. I think of those hundred vassals, whose devotion and fidelity you praised so highly, and who must at this very moment be so sad at your absence."

"Mordiou! They have ample to do," faltered poor Raoul, scarcely knowing what he was saying.

"Yes, and your horses, your fields, your kennels!" continued his fair tormentor vivaciously. "How many hounds have you in each?"

Raoul was silent.

"Well, you don't answer me? How thoughtful you have become, almost sad! What is the matter, chevalier?"

"The matter is," burst out Raoul, unable to contain himself longer—"the matter is that I have nothing at all."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Vrissac, in affected surprise.

"I mean that if it was upon the rich and powerful suzerain you deigned to smile just now——"

"Then you have no château?"

"Yes, but——"

"But?"

"It is in ruins."

"And the towers?"

"They lie upon the ground."

"But your vassals! How many vassals have you?"

"Two."

"Two!"

"Who would have loved you as a hundred. And so would my poor Rustaud."

"Who is Rustaud?"

"Rustaud," stammered the chevalier, overwhelmed with shame—"Rustaud is my kennels."

"But then, chevalier, you have deceived me!"

The accent was severe, but if De Puycadère had dared to look in her face, he would have found that its expression told another tale.

"Yes," he answered, desperately, "yes, as I have others, but you had not told me then that I might hope for your love. Now, I can no longer lie, and I tell you all."

"Perhaps even what you have told me to-night is not true," she said, in a much gentler tone.

"Never!" he cried, passionately. "Never! See! Here is your handkerchief which I have worn next my heart since the moment I first met you! Yes, I am poor, an adventurer! But loved by you, you shall see of what I am capable! My love will accomplish miracles! And if, perchance, you should desire for your golden head a crown made of stars, I would fly to the skies to gather for you the most brilliant!"

Mademoiselle de Vrissac laughed—a silvery, happy laugh.

"You incorrigible Gascon!" she exclaimed.

And then with one of those sudden changes of mood and manner which were so natural to her, and which set upon her with peculiar charm, she added, almost caressingly:

"Think no more of your poverty. One who asks

aught else of love save love itself does not deserve to be loved."

A torrent of rapturous words rushed to Raoul's lips, but their flow was interrupted by the appearance between the curtains of a page, who announced that the queen was about to retire and demanded the presence of Mademoiselle de Vrissac.

"Say to her majesty I will join her instantly," replied Gabrielle.

"One moment," pleaded Raoul, as the page departed. "When shall I see you again?"

Gabrielle started, and for the first time her thoughts turned toward her aunt and her cousin, the vicomte. What would her guardians say to a Huguenot suitor? A Huguenot! Ah! And an iron hand seemed to grasp her heart as she remembered the maudlin confidences of Paul de Bassompierre. What had he said? "Within four and twenty hours Paris will be gay at the death-dance of the heretics." Then Raoul, her lover,—yes and the man that she loved with the whole strength of her virgin heart—was in danger! But the duke had said too that all who wore a white cross on their hat and a white scarf on their arm were safe.

There was no time to lose. The queen even now might be impatient. Under the chevalier's wondering eyes she tore her handkerchief with feverish haste into the rude semblance of a double cross, and snatching up Raoul's hat from where it lay on the window-seat, she deftly fastened it in the front.

Then turning to the bewildered young man, she caught the other handkerchief which he still held in his hands and tied it about his arm just above his elbow.

"There is no time for explanation," she said, raising

her lovely eyes to his with a world of entreaty in their violet depths, and something suspiciously like a sob in her voice. "Keep these concealed until you have left the palace. But promise me that you will wear them! Wear them, for my sake! Promise me—promise me, *Raoul!*"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EVE OF SAINT BARTHOLOMEW.

Puzzled as he was, what could Raoul de Puycadère do but consent? And no sooner was the promise given than Gabrielle was forced to hasten away to join the queen.

With the sunshine of her presence vanished, the chevalier had no desire to linger further at the Louvre. It was very late, and he had a long journey back to Saint Germain. Drawing his cloak over the white badge upon his arm, and holding his hat pressed against his side so as to conceal the cross, he traversed the throne room, which was now thinning rapidly, as their majesties of Navarre had already taken their departure. As he neared the door, he suddenly became aware of a group of courtiers gathered together only a pace or two away. He raised his eyes and met the gaze of a dark, sinister-looking man, a gaze of infinite hatred and malignancy. He recognized him at once; it was the man with whom he had quarreled at Saint Germain, the cousin and guardian of Gabrielle.

Involuntarily De Puycadère paused, but, as the vicomte made no movement, he contented himself with a respectful salutation to the group, and passed out of the door, down the staircase, and into the street.

The place in front of the Louvre was almost deserted now, presenting a strong contrast to the scene Raoul had witnessed upon his arrival at the palace.

He hurried along, meeting every now and then little knots of men, who eyed him curiously, but made no offer to molest him.

He, on his part, paid no attention to them. His thoughts were too busy with the exciting events of the evening. A thousand birds were singing in his heart a melody sweeter far than living birds were ever known to sing, a melody of which the refrain was: Gabrielle! Gabrielle! Gabrielle!

Suddenly, as he turned swiftly the corner of a street, he was roused from his pleasant revery by running plump into a burly fellow, who with an oath clapped his hand to the hilt of his sword.

But as the light from a swinging lantern struck full upon Raoul's face, he thrust back his half-drawn blade with an exclamation of surprise.

"What! Master Raoul! You! You in Paris!"

Raoul was no less astounded to recognize the florid, honest countenance of one who had been many years in the service of his father.

"Mordiou! Is it you, Simon Beppa?" grasping both the man's hands. "And how prospers it, old comrade?"

"Fairly well, Master Raoul, fairly well. I am landlord of the Green Dragon, close to the Pont Neuf."

"I'll give you a call, good Simon. I'll warrant you scarcely expected to see me in Paris."

Simon Beppa started, and gave a quick glance about him. Then, seeing that no one was within earshot, he answered, but with evident anxiety:

"No, nor desired to; pardon me, Monsieur le Chevalier, but what evil wind has blown you hither?"

"Evil wind!" echoed Raoul, gayly. "Evil wind! Say rather the softest breeze that ever blew a voyager

to a wished-for shore. I came borne upon the wings of Hope, my faithful Simon."

"I would it had blown you anywhere else," retorted his companion grimly. "Have a care, Master Raoul. I fear——"

"Peste, good Simon! We Huguenots are no longer in danger——"

"Chut! chut!" interrupted Beppa in alarm, grasping the chevalier's cloak imploringly. "By blessed Saint Martin! Have a care, Master Raoul!"

"Mordiou! he swears by the saints," returned Raoul, laughing. "My father's old Protestant steward! What new miracle is this!"

With every word, Beppa's agitation and alarm seemed to increase. He took a fresh grip on the young man's cloak, and said, almost in a whisper:

"I go with the times, Master Raoul, and these are fearful ones. Take the advice of an old servant and well-wisher to the name of Puycadère, and just take horse again and put a ten good leagues between you and this Papistical city of Paris!"

"Far from it! Here I remain! You know not, old blockhead, that I am equerry to the King of Navarre."

Simon started back, releasing the cloak, and in so doing exposing the white handkerchief bound about De Puycadère's arm.

"Equerry to the King of Navarre!" he echoed. And then, as he caught sight of the snowy badge, he gasped and his eyes nearly bulged out of his head in astonishment. "What! You, a Protestant, wear this?" and he touched the handkerchief.

"Why not?" retorted Raoul, a little angrily. "Of course I am a Protestant."

"But this badge?"

"That I wear in obedience to a promise given."

"And you know not its meaning?"

Had the light from the lantern not been shining full in Raoul's eyes and so dazzled his sight, he might have noticed that Simon Beppa also wore a band of white linen on his arm.

"Meaning, no! Explain yourself!"

"Oh! Master Raoul!" ejaculated Beppa, now beside himself with terror, not on his own account, but on account of the son of his old master, "I implore you come with me and I will hide you in the Green Dragon."

"Hide!" exclaimed the chevalier, now quite out of patience with Beppa's extraordinary behavior. "No, not a step do I go, till this mystery is explained."

"And there is no time to be lost," groaned Simon, wringing his hands. Then, as if taken with a desperate resolution, he went on breathlessly: "Master Raoul, it is death for a Huguenot to be in the streets this night. In five minutes the bell of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois will give the signal for a general massacre."

In horrified incredulity, Raoul seized the other by the arm.

"Impossible!" he gasped.

"'Tis true. Oh, believe me, before it is too late. 'Tis by the order of the king and the Duke of Guise and the admiral is to be the first victim."

"Coligny!"

"Yes."

"But how do you know this?"

"As I told you, I go with the times. I—I am a Catholic now."

Raoul knew the former steward well, and, his first amazement gone, he was convinced that he was speaking the truth.

In an instant the chevalier's resolution was taken.

"Where does the admiral live?"

"In the Rue de Béthisy, a large house, opening on a court in front, flanked by two wings."

"And the nearest way?"

"Through an alley-way, two streets down, and then through the Rue des Fossès close to the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois."

"Thanks."

"Where are you going? Master Raoul, where are you going?" cried Simon, attempting to stay the way.

But the impetuous Gascon, with little ceremony, waved him aside.

"To warn the admiral!" he cried. "Pray God I be in time!"

And before the worthy ex-servitor of his family could make move to prevent him, he had vanished at full speed around the corner.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEATH-KNELL.

Overcome with horror at the revelation which had just been made to him, but still with but one thought in his mind—the salvation of the admiral,—Raoul ran at full speed until he reached the alley which was the short cut to the Rue des Fossès.

Here he was brought to a stop by a man apparently a sentinel, who lowered his arquebuse and barred the way.

"The watchword, comrade!"

"Guise," cried De Puycadère, imagining that on such a night this would be the most natural password. And his instinct proved true. For after a scrutiny which showed the white badges the sentinel lowered his weapon with a brief:

"Pass, comrade! Death to the Huguenots!"

And Raoul, too breathless to reply, sped down the dark alley.

Stumbling over the rough pavement, he finally emerged into the better lighted Rue des Fossès.

Scarcely had he passed the corner, when the sharp crack of a pistol saluted his ears, responded to almost on the moment by one deep note boomed forth from the tower of the neighboring church.

The signal!

Was there yet time, or would he be too late?

As if by magic, the street was filled with a surging

mass. From the neighboring houses, the savage soldiers of the Italian and Swiss guards, who had been well primed with strong drink, leaped forth, and in a moment the air rang with the clank of arms and the cry:

"Kill! Kill! Death to the Huguenots!"

Every man was armed, some with drawn swords, others with arquebuses, and some in the left hand held torches which threw a fitful glare over the scene.

Hemmed in as he was on all sides, Raoul determined to sell his life dearly. At the first sound of the bell, he had drawn his sword, but there seemed to be no opportunity to use it. No one seemed disposed to molest him, although more than one scrutinized him closely, but a glance at the double cross in his hat apparently banished all suspicion.

"Kill! Kill! Death to the Huguenots! The king has signed the warrant of their doom!" rang out from hundreds of throats, parched with the thirst of blood.

"Vive la Messe! Vive le Duc de Guise! Mort aux Huguenots!"

And now ensued a horrible scene. The houses of the Huguenots, previously marked with a white cross, were broken open, and the inmates dragged out to be butchered in cold blood.

Amid the din of yelling soldiers, the groans of the dying, the shrieks of despairing women and the affrighted screams of children, rose the sound of bells from almost every belfry in Paris.

Stunned, horrified, Raoul was borne along by the yelling masses, realizing his powerlessness, but determined to snatch at any chance that might enable him to reach the admiral first, warn him, and aid him to escape.

Suddenly there were loud cries ahead of:

"Guise! Guise!"

The crowd parted right and left, and through the broken ranks appeared a young man, riding upon a powerful black horse and waving a sword above his head. It was the popular idol, Henri of Lorraine, Duke of Guise, the instigator of the foul work.

As if to increase the mob's frenzy, he cried at the top of his voice:

"Kill! Kill! The doctors say blood letting in August is as good as in May! To the admiral's! To the admiral's!"

"To the admiral's! Guise! Guise!" screamed the nearest of the mob, and the cry was taken up and re-echoed far down the street.

In the press that greeted the advent of the duke, De Puycadère was forced close to the wall. Not a yard away was a dark passage, between two lofty houses. This passage led in the direction of the Rue de Béthisy, and as Raoul realized this, he at once formed a plan of action.

Pushing and crowding his way and paying but scant attention to the oaths and angry looks that greeted his progress, he succeeded in reaching the entrance. Then, watching his opportunity, he darted down the passage and dashed wildly away with no other guide than instinct. It was hard work, for the passage was ill paved, and more than once he narrowly escaped being thrown headlong to the ground.

A dim light ahead showed what must be the Rue de Béthisy, and he redoubled his speed. Was he in time? Yes, the street was quiet. The mob had not reached the admiral's.

Turning the corner, he sped along the Rue de Bé-

thisy and had almost reached the house of the admiral, when his headlong career was rudely checked by the appearance directly in his path of a soldier in the uniform of the Swiss guard, who stepped out from the shadow of a portico.

"Halt!"

Too excited to remember watchword or excuse, the chevalier without a moment's hesitation attacked his challenger. The fight was brief, for although Raoul received a slight cut across the forehead, he was too good a swordsman for his antagonist, and, in shorter time than it takes to tell it he had run the latter through the body.

The Swiss uttered a loud shriek and fell prone upon the pavement.

Thrusting the body aside with his foot, Raoul ran madly on.

During the delay, the mob had entered the street. The red glare of the torches made a path as if of blood before him, and the footsteps and yells of the pursuing crowd, which could not be more than three hundred yards away, gave him wings. The blood from his wound was trickling down his face and half blinding him. His gasping breath came in a hoarse rattle from his chest. At last! The entrance of the admiral's house was before him. In desperation he flung himself against the door and beat with both hands upon the panels.

"Open!" he screamed hoarsely. "Open, in the king's name!"

Nearer and nearer came the frenzied rabble. Would the door never be opened? Then, just as he was yielding to despair, the clank of chains and the rattle of bolts fell upon his ear and the heavy portals swung

slowly open. Darting in, Raoul unceremoniously pushed aside the pale and trembling porter, and slammed the doors to. To make all fast was the work of a moment, but it was accomplished none too soon, for scarcely was the last bolt rushed into its socket, than the oak resounded with the first onslaught of the would-be assassins.

The chevalier dashed the blood from out of his eyes, and seizing the porter by the arm, he commanded him to lead the way to the admiral.

The shaking wretch obeyed, wringing his hands and groaning:

"Oh! my poor master, he has been wounded for the cause of France and now he is to be slain by his own countrymen!"

Hurrying his guide with fierce words and even with pricks of his sword, the chevalier, mad with impatience, traversed corridor after corridor, finally to find himself in a medium-sized apartment, in which were gathered together some dozen persons.

From the little group advanced a stately, dignified old man, with a long white beard flowing over his breast.

"Monsieur, may I ask the reason of this intrusion?" he inquired calmly.

"The admiral?" gasped Raoul, still breathless from his recent exertions.

"Yes, I am Coligny."

"Away, monsieur, away, or it will be too late. Even now the hell-hounds are on your track, seeking your life."

As De Puycadère spoke, there was a distant, resounding crash, which told that the entrance had been beaten down. And then came the sound of hurrying footsteps and angry voices.

The admiral knew what it meant, as well he might, for his servants were being butchered, and their shrieks rang through the house.

"Fly," he said quietly, turning to the attendants who remained near him. "You cannot save me, and it will be vain to fling away your lives in the cause of a man who stands on the threshold of the grave." There was a moment of hesitation, and then, as the sounds of the savage clamor grew nearer, all save one turned and ran like frightened sheep, seeking to make their escape by the roof.

"The cowards!" cried Raoul in a fury, and he would have sought to stay their flight had not the admiral himself commanded him to desist.

The one who remained was a tall, pale man, dressed in a physician's gown of sombre black.

"Fly, my good Ambrose, fly," urged Coligny.

"Never," retorted Pare, for it was the king's physician who was in attendance on the admiral and had happened to remain in the house that night. "Never! If I cannot save you, at least I can die with you!"

The thunder of approaching footsteps was in the corridor, and before another word could be spoken the curtains which covered the doorway were thrust violently aside, and into the room rushed a crowd of men in glittering cuirasses, shrieking like demons and waving their blood-stained weapons.

With drawn sword, Raoul sprang in front of the admiral!

CHAPTER X.

THE ASSASSINATION OF COLIGNY.

"Who are you?" asked a rough-looking fellow with a German accent, stepping up to Raoul, as the rabble in seemingly countless numbers poured into the room. "We seek Admiral Coligny!"

The chevalier's eyes flashed fire. Holding himself on the defensive, he answered in a clear, ringing voice:

"You can reach him only over my dead body."

"Oh, say you so!" retorted the other, whose name was Behm, and who was a villain of the first order. "We will soon settle that, my master!" And he made a movement to rush upon the dauntless Gascon.

But before a blow could be struck on either side, Raoul, whose whole attention had been concentrated upon the German, felt his wrist seized from behind in an iron grasp, and a sudden twist sent his sword flying into a corner of the room. Then, before he could recover himself, stout hands seized him on either side, and his arms were as effectively pinioned as if they had been bound.

"I will deal with him, Master Behm," exclaimed one of his captors. "I know him. He has been drinking and is not himself. Look at his badges. He is as good a Catholic as yourself."

"Very well," growled the German. "We'll take the big fish and let the small fry go. One salmon is worth more than a thousand frogs!"

In spite of his resistance, Raoul was dragged away from in front of the admiral. But as he still continued to struggle, one of the men proceeded calmly to trip him up, and then sat down on his arms while the other planted himself on his feet.

"It's no use, Master Raoul, you can do nothing. It was the only way to save your life," whispered a voice in his ear, which he recognized as that of Simon Beppa, and though inwardly raging at his helplessness, he was forced to submit.

Neither Coligny nor Ambrose Pare was armed, but neither flinched before the bloodthirsty assassins.

"Which of you is the admiral?" demanded Behm, with a coarse oath.

But before a reply could be made, a voice of command rang out from the corridor:

"Don't touch the man in black, on your lives! It is the king's physician, and his life is sacred!"

Behm made a sign to his followers, and Ambrose Pare, who was possessed of but little physical strength, was seized and removed from the side of his doomed friend.

"So, you are Coligny!" ejaculated the German, his eyes aflame with the lust of murder.

The venerable admiral, who had won so many victories for his country and his king, drew his stately figure up to its full height.

"I am he," he replied, calmly. "But beware, young sir, before you stain your hands with my blood. I am a wounded and helpless man! But why should I waste breath? If I am to die, my last thoughts should be of Him who gave me life."

Scarcely had the last word been uttered when Behm plunged into his stomach a huge, pointed boar-spear,

which he had in his hand, and then struck him on the head with it.

Raoul uttered a cry of impotent rage, and struggled without avail to free himself.

Coligny fell, murmuring:

"If it were but a man! But 'tis a horse-boy!"

Others of the miscreants then advanced and struck him in their turn.

"Holà, Behm," cried a voice from without, and, pushing through the crowd, appeared a young man, clothed in the richest of velvet, with a jewelled collar about his neck and falling low over his breast.

"'Tis done, Monseigneur," replied the German, with the greatest sang-froid, pointing to the body prostrate at his feet.

"Ma foi, 'tis indeed the admiral!" ejaculated Guise, approaching, and viewing the helpless figure with silent ecstasy.

"Ah!" he continued, planting his foot upon the breast of the Protestant hero. "At last, Coligny! Murderer of my father, thus do I avenge him!"

But so tenacious of life was the unhappy man, that, though stabbed and hacked in a dozen places, he opened his eyes, clinched his mutilated hand, and, in a hollow voice, with his fast-glazing eyes fixed upon the duke, panted forth: "Henri de Guise, I did not kill your father. One day the foot of the assassin shall be planted upon your breast! My curse upon you!"

Pale as death, the duke started back, and an involuntary shudder passed over him. It seemed to him that the veil of the future had suddenly been rent in twain.

But not so with Behm. No qualms assaulted his guilt-hardened conscience.

"Peste!" he cried. "The old fox has nine lives like a cat!"

And, drawing his dagger, he stabbed the helpless admiral again and again.

With one long-drawn sigh, the soul of the splendid old man passed to its Maker.

Shuddering, the Duke of Guise passed his hand over his face, which was contorted as that of one in mortal agony.

"'Tis a good beginning," he said in a hollow voice, and, nerving himself to the effort, he spurned the body with his foot. "Forward! Death to the Huguenots as the king commands!"

"And Master Pare, Monseigneur?" asked Behm.

"Release him. The king has exacted that his life shall be spared."

The physician advanced, and, kneeling by the side of the dead admiral, took his head in his lap.

Guise gave him one contemptuous glance, and, turning, strode rapidly from the room, followed by Behm and many of the others.

"You are free, Master Raoul," said Simon Beppa, releasing his captive, who rose to his feet and groaned in anguish as he saw that the bloody work had been consummated.

"Forgive my violence," continued Beppa, "but otherwise you would have shared his fate. And now I beseech you to come with me. Single-handed, you can do nothing, and the Green Dragon will offer you a safe asylum."

Reluctantly, the chevalier was forced to concede that the innkeeper was right and was about to assent to his proposition, when suddenly a man darted from the mass that were pushing their way through the rather

narrow exit, and, flourishing his sword, made straight toward them, his dark face illumined with a fiendish delight at the discovery.

"'Tis the Vicomte de Vrissac!" muttered Beppa in dismay, and the Chevalier recognized him at the same instant.

The other members of the murdering band had by this time left the room, the heavy door clanging behind them.

"Hold, monsieur," cried Beppa, advancing a step or two, and, by so doing, placing himself between the vicomte and his intended victim. "You are mistaken. This is no Huguenot. See his badge."

"A pest upon his badge! Did he wear twenty crosses I know him for a Huguenot of the Huguenots. Was he not this very night made equerry to the so-styled King of Navarre. Out of my way, blockhead!"

"But——"

"You are right, Monsieur le Vicomte," interrupted Raoul, thrusting Simon aside. "I am the Chevalier de Puycadère and a Huguenot. I am pleased to encounter you again and to have this opportunity to renew the quarrel interrupted at Saint Germain."

"I do not fight with heretics," retorted the other furiously; "I slay them as I would a mad dog."

And without further words, he made a rush upon the young Gascon.

To avoid the onslaught, Raoul retreated a step or two, and as he did so his foot struck against some object on the floor—his own sword, which had fallen there when hurled away by Beppa.

With a *rugissement* of joy he stooped and snatched it up. Not a moment too soon! for the vicomte was already upon him. Indeed the former's sharp blade

pierced the sleeve of the chevalier's doublet, tearing away, as it was withdrawn, Gabrielle's handkerchief.

"Coward!" roared Raoul, striking his assailant on the face with the flat of his weapon for want of room to thrust at him with the point.

With a furious ejaculation and white with anger, De Vrissac retreated a step, and then steel clashed against steel. The vicomte was a swordsman of the first order, and Raoul soon recognized that he had met his equal. Exhausted as he was by excitement and the loss of blood resulting from the wound he had received from the Swiss soldier, it taxed all his skill to parry the thrusts of his adversary without thinking of taking the offensive himself.

He found himself being forced gradually backward until finally his back was against the wall.

Encouraged by his success, the vicomte pursued the attack still more vigorously.

The result was still in doubt, however, when a most extraordinary thing happened.

The wall behind Raoul suddenly gave way, and the room, the lights, his antagonist all vanished from his vision.

He had fallen violently backward into a region of utter darkness.

CHAPTER XI.

THE KING'S PHYSICIAN.

Mysterious as seemed Raoul's sudden disappearance, the explanation was very simple.

Pressed closely as he was against the wall, his body had touched the secret spring of a sliding panel, which had glided back into place after the involuntary transit of the chevalier.

The Gascon's predicament was anything but pleasant. As soon as he had recovered from the shock, he set himself to work to discover into what sort of a place he had been precipitated. He was in inklike darkness, but by groping along the walls, which were built of stone, he judged that he was in an apartment some fifteen feet square. Save the way by which he had entered, outlet there was apparently none whatever, and try as he would he could not discover the spring of the panel.

The place in all likelihood had been arranged by some former owner of the house as a hiding-place in time of danger, and it is quite improbable, in view of recent events, that either the admiral or any of his attendants was aware of its existence.

Worn out and discouraged, Raoul finally threw himself down on the hard floor and soon fell into the dreamless sleep of exhaustion.

It was long after daybreak when he awoke.

As soon as he recovered his senses and realized where

he was, he arose to a sitting posture and endeavored to pierce the gloom about him.

It seemed to him that the darkness was not so intense as it had been. And sure enough, as he raised his eyes, far above his head glimmered two round spots of light, undoubtedly openings into the outer air.

He leaped to his feet and felt his way to the wall. Built as it was of solid masonry, how could he hope to climb up?

Drawing a dagger he wore in his belt, and which had been lent to him by Madame Goujon as a portion of his attire, he inserted the point between two stones about two feet from the ground and had soon dug out sufficient of the mortar to leave a resting-place for his feet.

Clinging to the joining in the stonework, he mounted upon the tiny platform he had made, and proceeded to dig out a similar one a little farther up.

His progress was slow and painful, but he finally managed to reach the two loopholes, near the roof. These he found to be the entrances to a dilapidated dovecot. As he peered in, two pigeons, startled at the intrusion, flew out with a great whirr of wings.

Through the holes, he could see nothing but the sky and a distant view of roofs. There was no hope here, for even if he should succeed in enlarging the openings sufficiently to admit of the passage of his body, he would be perched in mid-air, with no possibility of reaching the ground.

He obtained one meagre advantage, however, by his climb. The dovecote contained ten eggs, which he took possession of and carefully stowed away in his pockets. These at least would ward off starvation for a little time.

Descending to the ground, he instituted another fruitless search for the spring. He had but one hope now, and that was that Beppa would return and find some means to release him.

Slowly the hours dragged out their weary length. That day passed and the second was near its close, when Raoul was startled from his gloomy reflections by a slight scratching sound just opposite where he was sitting, and in another moment the panel slid aside, letting in a flood of light which almost blinded him.

With a cry he leaped to his feet and rushed toward the opening.

Beppa had come at last!

But it was not Beppa who assisted him out of his prison.

It was the tall, intellectual-looking man he had seen with the admiral Saint Bartholomew's eve.

"Steadily! steadily! my young friend," said the physician as Raoul staggered into the room, faint from his enforced starvation. "Not a word! Eat first!"

And, taking him by the arm, he led him to a table on which were a cold fowl, bread, and a bottle of strong wine.

Not until he had devoured a portion of the fowl and drank a goodly half of the wine would his rescuer allow him to speak.

Then he related to the young man what had happened after his sudden disappearance.

The vicomte, Beppa, and Ambrose Pare himself had all tried to remove the panel, but were finally forced to give it up in despair.

Escorted by Beppa and his friend, the king's physician, after several narrow escapes, had succeeded in reaching the Louvre.

But not until to-day had it been safe for him to return and endeavor to free Raoul from his confinement, which he had finally succeeded in accomplishing.

"And the King of Navarre?" asked Raoul with anxiety.

"The king is safe."

"Does the massacre still continue?"

Ambrose Pare shuddered.

"No, but thousands have been slaughtered. This morning King Charles issued a proclamation making it unlawful to rob and kill. And the order is generally obeyed, although the animosities and fury of the populace are still greatly inflamed."

"Surely the vile work was not at the king's command?" The physician's only reply was a shrug of the shoulders, and the question was pressed no further.

Suddenly Raoul started to his feet.

"Mordiou!" he exclaimed, vehemently. "I was to report to the King of Navarre yesterday. I must to the Louvre at once."

"Gently! gently, young sir," said Master Pare with a smile. "Henri understands. You are not to go to the Louvre. I bear you the king's commands."

"Quick, that I may obey."

"You are to go to the Green Dragon, where you are to remain under cover for three days, when the roads mayhap will be safer to travel. I have arranged all with Master Beppa. In three days, you are to proceed to La Rochelle and deliver this packet with your own hands to the governor. A horse will be provided for you and sent to the stables of the Green Dragon. And here are the first emoluments of your new position as equerry to Henri of Navarre."

As he spoke, he placed in the chevalier's hand a

medium-sized package sealed with the royal arms and a purse heavy with gold pieces.

"And now," continued the physician, "cover yourself with this mantle," and he pointed to a cloak which was thrown over the back of a chair, "and repair forthwith to the Green Dragon. Beppa expects you."

"And you?"

"I shall remain here for a short time, and then return to the Louvre. It is not well that we should be seen in public together."

Raoul held out his hand, which was taken in a warm grasp by the physician, who, although he had seen him but twice, had conceived a strong affection for the brave and impetuous young Gascon.

"My friend," he said, moved by a sudden impulse, "would you take a word of advice from a man thrice your age in years and experience?"

"Speak! Believe me, I am honored, but first let me know to whom I owe these good offices."

The old man laughed.

"True! I had forgotten. I am Ambrose Pare, physician to their majesties of France."

The name was one most familiar to the chevalier, who had often heard it on his father's lips, and he knew that he was in the presence of one whom, even in that profligate age, all delighted to honor for his virtues. He was the physician of the poor as well as of the rich, the adviser of the high and the comforter of the lowly.

"There is a good old adage," continued Master Pare, "and even with the scant knowledge I have of you, I think I may say that there is no one I know to whom it will be of more advantage than yourself: 'Look before you leap!' You are young, intelligent, brave, but—and in the *but* is all my warning—you don't stop to think.

You rush heedlessly in at portals which a moment's reflection would cause you to pass by."

The chevalier flushed. He knew in his heart that the old man had read him correctly, but he had too little self-conceit—that stumbling-block in many a good man's path—to be offended, and he received the advice in the spirit in which it was offered.

Bidding the fine old man farewell, he repaired to the Green Dragon, which he had no difficulty in finding on the left-hand side of the Pont Neuf.

The city was comparatively quiet, but he saw on every side signs of the last two terrible days in the blood-stained pavements and the partially demolished houses which had belonged to those of the Huguenot persuasion. Almost every one he met wore white crosses in his cap or hat, making, as an historian of the times, in commenting upon the fact, remarked with unconscious sarcasm, "a most pretty effect."

As has been said, the handkerchief had been torn from Raoul's arm in his fight with the vicomte, and the cross in his hat together with its clasp had also disappeared. In spite of his promise to Gabrielle, this was not a cause of unmixed regret to him, as the fiery young Huguenot had no desire to sail under false colors. The absence of the emblems caused many an angry glance to be cast at him, but no actual violence was offered.

Once, however, he came near being involved in an altercation, which might have cost him dear, had he not remembered the physician's words of advice just in time to check himself.

As he was making his way through the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, his attention was attracted to the conversation of two young men walking just behind him.

"It is true," said one. "Henri de Bourbon has recanted."

"Impossible!"

"Peste! Why not? The king offered him his choice: Death, mass, or the Bastile, and he chose the easiest—mass."

The chevalier's first impulse was to turn and give the young man the lie in his teeth, but fortunately "Look before you leap" flashed across his mind and he refrained in time. For any one openly championing the cause of the King of Navarre, with the temper of the populace such as it was, would undoubtedly have been slain, in spite of the king's edict.

Not for one moment did Raoul believe the young man's statement was true. And yet in this case his confidence was misplaced, as he was destined to know beyond a doubt at no distant date. The King of Navarre *had* recanted. It is no place here to question this act of him who was destined to be one of the greatest kings France has ever known. It was all a question of policy, and, looked at in that light, perhaps justified. At all events the recantation was afterward publicly disavowed, and Henri de Bourbon lived and died in the faith in which he was reared by his martyr mother.

Raoul received a warm welcome from Beppa on his arrival at the Green Dragon, and was installed in the innkeeper's own private room, which led off of the chief apartment of the inn, corresponding to what is known in modern times as the café.

The horse had arrived, and the chevalier at once proceeded to make acquaintance with it. It was a magnificent animal of pure Castilian breed. Raoul stroked its glossy neck, and the animal, with a low whinny, laid its velvet muzzle against his cheek. At

once a friendship was established between the two, one of those friendships possible only between man and beast in which there is no jealousy, in which no misunderstanding can arise, and which survives undiminished through evil report and good report alike.

One of Raoul's first cares was to send to good Madame Goujon a sum which more than repaid her for her kindness, together with a message which pretty Rose valued more than the gold pieces themselves. With a portion of the money left he purchased through Beppa a suitable riding-suit and a brace of pistols.

These matters attended to, there was nothing for our young equerry to do save to possess his soul in patience, as best he might, in the haven appointed, until had elapsed the three days exacted by the King of Navarre, before he was to start on his mission to La Rochelle.

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE SIGN OF THE GREEN DRAGON.

The Green Dragon was doing a thriving business the night after the chevalier's arrival, and Simon Beppa, congratulating his honest soul upon the fact, was here, there, and everywhere with his two assistants.

And in truth the chief room of the inn was a pleasant place to lounge in, outside of the good cheer to be obtained there.

It was very spacious, occupying the whole centre of the house. At one end was a monumental fireplace, with broad, comfortable wooden settles on either side, and opposite the entrance, which led directly to the street, was a staircase with heavy open balustrades, leading to a sort of wooden balcony or platform jutting out over the Seine.

Through the window could be seen a portion of the Pont Neuf, then in an incomplete state, and the slow-moving waters of the river.

On the evening in question, a group of Bohemians, three in number, two girls and a man, were attempting to amuse the guests. They were our old friends of the Gelosi troupe, who brought the chevalier in their van to Saint Germain.

Pharos, the male member of the trio, sat upon the ground strumming a guitar, while the girls, Mirza and Pippa, sang and danced graceful Spanish dances.

At a table near by were seated three or four soldiers,

prominent among them, by his swaggering manner and boastful language, being Annibal Goujon, sergeant of the king's guard and husband of pretty Rose.

The worthy sergeant had evidently been indulging in quite as much wine as was good for him, for his always florid complexion was now of a bright scarlet and his speech was thick and guttural.

Ever and anon he cast an angry glance at the Tzigani, whose music distracted the attention of his comrades from his own remarks, and Annibal, in his overweening vanity, always desired to be the chief figure in every scene at which he was present.

Finally, annoyed beyond all endurance, he rose unsteadily from his seat, and, bringing his huge fist down upon the table with a violence that set the bottles and glasses to dancing, he bellowed out:

"Silence, you gypsy mummers! Your caterwauling turns the wine sour! A song to please Annibal Goujon must have the clank of steel in it!"

And to punctuate his remarks he gave his sword-hilt a resounding slap.

The music of the guitar ceased, and the girls paused in dismay.

"By the corns of Saint Ursula, see that we have no more of it! If you want a song, I'll give you a beauty. And," with a glare about him, "who fails to join in the chorus, I'll slit his nose with my dagger!" And, without further ado, he struck a swashbuckler attitude, and began to roar out in a voice which, if nothing else, had plenty of lung power:

"Here's a health to the Duke of Guise
Whose name makes all heretics pale;
Whose sword beats the chaff from the corn,
So we've dubbed it the Catholic flail."

With a tremendous crashing together of glasses, his fellow-soldiers joined in the chorus:

"With a clink and a clank,
With a clink and a clank,
Here's more strength to the Catholic flail!"

"Let the health go round!" hiccoughed Goujon with a drunken flourish.

"The bottle is empty," replied one of the soldiers, reversing the flask at his elbow to prove the truth of his words.

"Empty! With such a toast, there shall be no stint. Landlord! Landlord!"

"Here, sergeant," replied Simon Beppa, hurrying up, and looking the typical *aubergiste* in his twisted apron and *bonnet de coton.*

"Wine!" commanded Goujon, with a grand air.

"And the money, Sergeant?"

"Money? Money! He demands money to drink the health of the Duke of Guise. Hic! He's a Huguenot —a heretic—hic—a——"

"I! nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Simon, alarmed and anxious to avoid all disturbance, especially over so dangerous a subject. "Here, Antoine! Pierre! wine for the gentlemen!"

"May it choke them!" he thought resentfully to himself, as he moved away to see the order obeyed.

The wine was brought and, the anger of the sergeant considerably mollified thereby, a long life to the Duke of Guise was drunk with a vast amount of enthusiasm.

In the midst of the revelry, a door, quite close to the table where the soldiers were seated, was opened quietly and a figure wrapped in a long cloak and with a slouch

hat drawn low down over the brow entered the apartment.

After twenty-four hours' confinement, the patience of the Chevalier de Puycadère had become exhausted, and he had determined to venture forth and seek if possible some news of Gabrielle before his departure for La Rochelle.

As one of the soldiers, an Italian named Griffo, caught sight of him, he nudged the sergeant and whispered something in his ear. The latter rose unsteadily and with a full beaker of wine in his hand addressed the new-comer, before Simon Beppa, who scented danger at the unlooked-for appearance of the young Huguenot, could intervene.

"Come, my master," spluttered the sergeant. "Drink our toast in a bumper of good liquor. Here's to the Catholic flail."

"And a speedy downfall to Harry of Navarre," added Griffo.

The glass was held unsteadily and inconveniently near Raoul's nose.

Pretending to slip in a pool of liquor which had been spilled upon the floor, the Gascon struck the glass with his elbow and the sergeant's face was deluged with the contents.

"Hundred thousand devils!" cried Annibal in a fury and half drawing his sword. "By hilt and point, but blood shall flow for this!"

"Nonsense, sergeant!" said Raoul, with a good-humored laugh, and, placing his hand on the other's arm to prevent him carrying out his intention. "Wine is quicker drawn than blood, and, if spilt, more easily wiped away. Landlord, bring six bottles of your best, and I will pay the reckoning."

Beppa, in order to avoid all altercation, was only too glad to obey.

"Come, sergeant," added Raoul, still laughing, "let there be no ill-will between us. The wine is good."

"But the toast?" asked Goujon, somewhat appeased, though still sulky.

Raoul piled his arms full of the bottles which Beppa had brought.

"The score is paid," he said. "Fill! fill! And let what toast you please go round."

Still grumbling, Goujon with his load of bottles returned to his companions; and Beppa, catching Raoul by the arm, drew him a little one side.

"This is madness, Master Raoul," he whispered hurriedly. "Why do you——"

"Bah, old bear!" interrupted Raoul, gayly. "Did you think I could remain immured in that dull room any longer?"

But before the good landlord could reply the door leading to the street was thrown open, and a party of three or four gentlemen entered the room. They were all young, dressed with the utmost magnificence, and attended by a retinue of pages attired in the liveries of noble houses.

Beppa gave them one quick, frightened look and drew Raoul away with but little ceremony.

"Draw your hat down on your brows, Master Raoul," he implored, "and put your cloak well about you, for these are wild gallants of the court, who are as full of insolence as, in general, they are full of wine."

Meanwhile the young nobles had advanced well into the apartment, preceded by their pages, who drove the

other occupants from their benches and tables with buffets and strokes of their riding-whips.

"Here, Simon! Simon Beppa!" cried one handsome young fellow, who seemed to be the leader of the party. "Sweep your place clear of this *canaille!* Throw them outside the door."

"Or into the river," interposed another.

"Or anywhere so that they remove themselves from our vicinity." And the Duke de Bassompierre, for the speaker was that dissolute young nobleman, caught up an essence bottle of gold which was suspended by a jewelled chain from his belt, and inhaled it as if the atmosphere were poison to him.

"Ma foi, Lemours," he continued, addressing one of his friends. "This place is tainted with the odor of rascality. And no wonder, for I think I see that scoundrel Goujon yonder."

The chevalier was leaning nonchalantly against the fireplace, half-hidden in its shadow. Since the duke's first words he had been puzzling his brains to remember where he had heard that voice before; and now it all flashed across him. This haughty young fellow was the one he had heard talking to the Vicomte de Vrissac at Saint Germain, when he himself lay hidden in the gypsies' van.

As Sergeant Goujon heard his name pronounced by the duke, coupled though it was with anything but a complimentary epithet, he staggered forward, hat in hand, bowing most obsequiously.

"At your grace's service," he began, but was cut short by the duke's saying to his companions: "A brave fellow this—a very brave fellow; at firing from a window, or killing his man from behind the shadow of a bulkhead."

Poor Goujon's face, which had been wreathed in smiles at the first words, fell woefully at the uncomplimentary conclusion.

He was so confused that amidst the general laughter he tripped over his sword and only with difficulty recovered himself.

"Do you doubt my courage, monseigneur?" he asked, attempting to brave it out, although his face was as red as a poppy.

"Not I!" replied the duke with careless contempt. "I knew you for a bragging coward long ago. But here!" And motioning him to follow, he led the way a little apart from the others, and pausing as it chanced not three steps from where Raoul was standing in the shadow, so that each word of the conversation that ensued was distinctly audible to the involuntary eavesdropper.

"Well, my prince of go-betweens, old Sir Pandarus," began De Bassompierre, still daintily inhaling the essence of his vinaigrette, "is the girl amenable to reason?"

"The girl is an ill-conditioned wench," replied Goujon. "She stands upon her honor."

"Honor!" laughed the duke. "The honor of a Bohemian! Let her give me its weight in gold pieces, and the bargain's concluded."

"I—I have told monseigneur, that she will make no terms."

"Then we will try what force can do. Chut! She is there!" And he nodded toward where the little band of Tzigani were gathering up their paraphernalia and preparing to depart.

As the eyes of the young duke fell upon the dark beauty of Mirza, an expression crossed his handsome

countenance which was by no means pleasant to contemplate.

"They are marvellously pretty, those children of Satan," he murmured, "and this witch hath sorcery in her eyes to have enthralled me so."

"Sorcery," returned Goujon, with a superstitious shudder. "Were I in monseigneur's place I would exorcise the devil by means of a tall gibbet or faggot and tar barrel, on the Place de Grève."

"You are a fool and speak according to your folly," said the duke impatiently. And then he added in a lower tone, with a quick glance about him, "Have you any of your men here?"

"Griffo and Mironton—lads of steel! lads of steel!"

"Carry the girl away to the prison of the Grand Chatelet!" was the brief command.

Goujon started.

"But upon what plea?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"My pleasure!" retorted De Bassompierre, haughtily. "These wandering children of Pharaoh are beneath the law. *I* am above it. To the Chatelet with the gypsy, and I will meet you there."

As he spoke, evidently thinking that no answer was necessary or even possible, he turned and sauntered back with negligent grace to his friends.

The sergeant joined his two fellow-soldiers, and after a hurried consultation, the three approached the gypsies, who were now quite ready to depart.

Although the chevalier was not wholly unaware of the license allowed the young noblemen of the time, he was both shocked and indignant at the summary commands given to Goujon, especially as Mirza, the girl in question, was one to whom he was under obligations. He was quite resolved to frustrate the attempt,

but determined to await the progress of events before making any move.

"Well, Paul, mon ami," exclaimed Count Lemours, as the duke rejoined his companions, "you are neglecting your friends, especially your best friend, the bottle."

De Bassompierre leaned his hand lightly on the speaker's shoulder, and whispered a few words in his ear.

"What! Mirza the Tzigana!" exclaimed Lemours, looking up with a laugh. "Mort de ma vie! Tame that wild bird!"

"My gloves against your riding-whip, Lemours," said one of the other young noblemen, "the duke is tired of the bird before the bird tires of its cage."

"The duke is a conqueror who aims at universal conquest from the court to the cabaret. To Paul the Irresistible!"

"To Paul the Irresistible!"

The pages filled the glasses—but, before the toast could be drunk, a wild shriek ran through the room, and Mirza, pale with terror, rushed toward them, followed unsteadily by the sergeant, whose face showed signs of having come in contact with the pretty gypsy's nails.

At the same time the two soldiers, Griffo and Mironton, seized Pharos, the male member of the Tzigani, to prevent him going to the rescue.

The girl paused before the group of noblemen.

"In charity, gentlemen, protect me from this ruffian," she panted, her hands stretched out in supplication.

But, alas! there was nothing to be expected here. Her appeal was answered by a burst of laughter.

"Why, this is honest Sergeant Goujon," said the

duke, "the favorite alike of Mars and Venus. It is he who will protect you, my pretty flower of Egypt."

As he spoke, he attempted to throw his arm about her waist, but Mirza, more terrified now than ever, managed to elude his grasp.

She turned distractedly from one to the other, but only to meet with renewed laughter and jests at her frantic entreaties of protection from Goujon, who had again approached to seize her.

"A mountebank!"

"A street dancer!"

"A Bohemian!"

"But a woman!" cried a clear, ringing voice. And Raoul de Puycadère darted forward, and seizing Goujon by the shoulder hurled him violently aside.

The gypsy, recognizing him, crouched at his feet and grasped his cloak, imploring him not to leave her.

Then, as the astounded and angry young noblemen made a movement to advance upon him, the Gascon drew his sword and extended it over the form of the kneeling Tzigana.

"Back, gentlemen!" he exclaimed in tones of stern command. "While under this guard, not one of you shall harm her!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A DUEL WITH SWORD AND DAGGER.

White and trembling with rage, the Duke de Bassompierre faced the daring interferer with his lordly pleasure.

"By what right, my gentleman, do you meddle in matters that concern you not?" he demanded with insolent hauteur.

"By the right which devolves on every man to protect a woman from outrage," replied Raoul, calmly and imperturbably. "But who may you be, my gentleman, that you pitch your voice so high?"

"Paul, Duke de Bassompierre," was the answer, delivered with increased arrogance.

"Indeed!" said the chevalier, with an intensity of politeness which was far more effective and effectual than the other's passion. "Whose duty, I take it, is to protect and not to outrage his Majesty's subjects!"

The words and the half-contemptuous, half-pitying smile which accompanied them fired the duke's ire to a white heat.

"Your name!" he exclaimed, furiously.

Raoul's manner did not alter in the least nor was his equanimity apparently at all disturbed, as he asked:

"For what purpose do you desire to know?"

"I would know whether you are worthy the blade of a gentleman."

"At more fitting time and place, both name and

sword shall be at your service; for the present, it is my pleasure to guard an incognito."

During the dispute, Mirza had risen and moved away until she had joined her companions, Pharos having managed to free himself from the grasp of the soldiers, who were too much interested in the quarrel of their superiors to give him much attention.

Raoul saw that she was safe for the present at all events. He was about to turn away from the duke, when he felt a hand clutch his cloak and heard Simon Beppa's voice in his ear, saying in a hoarse whisper:

"The Provost's Guard is at the door! Sheathe your sword."

And, to prove the words, a trumpet blast rang out in the street.

"Au revoir, Monsieur le Duc," said the chevalier, bowing to the young man with cold politeness. "Another time, you may find me less patient."

And turning partially aside, he was about to return his sword to its scabbard, when De Bassompierre, with a violent ejaculation, sprang forward.

"How now, varlet," he almost screamed in his passion, "do you dare menace me? By the mass, I will have you cudgelled by my lackeys!"

As if moved by a steel spring, the chevalier wheeled and faced him.

"Have a care!" he said, in a low, tense tone, that in itself was a warning of coming danger. But the duke was now beside himself with fury.

"Of whom?" he demanded, with fiery scorn. "Of one of Navarre's beggarly troop, doubtless, who has come to Paris to cut a purse as his master would thieve a crown for lack of pay and rations. Be thankful your chastisement is no worse!"

And, with a rapid movements, he drew off one of his embroidered gloves and with it struck Raoul full across the mouth.

As if by magic, the whole manner of the chevalier underwent an instantaneous change, all his coolness vanished. The rich color mounted hot into his cheeks, and his eyes flashed fire upon his assailant. Grasping the duke by the breast with a hand of iron, he hissed through his clenched teeth:

"I am the Chevalier de Puycadère, a Huguenot and equerry to the King of Navarre! Your equal, Monsieur le Duc! Unsheathe your weapon, for, were you the King of France himself, your insolence should not pass unpunished!"

He hurled the duke roughly back, and, dashing his hat to the ground, slipped his cloak from his shoulders. Then drawing from his belt one of those short, sharp daggers known as "foi de gentilhomme," he stood on guard, his head thrown proudly back, sword and dagger in hand.

But he had declared himself a Huguenot, and swords of both soldiers and noblemen flashed in air, amidst a clamor of cries:

"A Huguenot! A Huguenot!"

"By the beard of Saint Bridget, I knew it!"

"Upon him all!"

Before this last command could be carried into execution, the duke, who had unsheathed his sword and drawn his dagger, sprang between.

"Back! back! All of you!" he commanded. "This quarrel's mine. In such matters, Paul de Bassompierre needs no proxy!"

The others fell back, forming a sort of half-circle about Raoul and the duke.

For a moment the two eyed each other; and then steel clashed against steel.

Once more without the trumpet sounded loud and clear.

"Heaven be praised!" ejaculated Simon Beppa. "The Provost's Guard!"

But before he could reach the door, he was stopped abruptly by Count Lemours, who exclaimed:

"It is a fair duel. Would these *canaille* interrupt gentlemen? Bolt the door, some of you!"

The order was obeyed, but not an instant too soon. For no quicker were the heavy bolts shot into place, than there came a tremendous pounding upon the panels of the door, and the voice of the Provost was heard demanding entrance in the king's name.

No one paid any attention, however. All were too intent upon the fight going on before their eyes.

Neither of the antagonists had yet the advantage, in that most picturesque of all the many fashions of the duello—with sword and poniard—where the poniard held in the left hand is used to protect the breast and parry sword-thrusts. The chevalier was unquestionably the best swordsman of the two and more than once he could have pierced the heart of his adversary. But he had no wish to kill the hot-headed young fellow. His only desire was to wound him slightly and give him a lesson he would not forget.

This was not the case with the duke, however. He thrust and cut with the greatest fury.

Suddenly, in one of these thrusts, the chevalier, by a skilful turn of the wrist, twisted the sword from the young man's hand and it fell clattering upon the floor.

With a cry of ungovernable rage, the duke snatched it up and hurled himself again upon his adversary.

The chevalier, who was now entirely cool, found no difficulty in parrying the thrust with his own sword, but the onslaught of the duke was so furious that the latter found it impossible to stop his impetus and he dashed himself against the chevalier, literally impaling himself upon the dagger which Raoul was holding point outward to protect his breast.

With a loud cry De Bassompierre staggered and fell, measuring his full length upon the ground.

Count Lemours rushed forward and raised the head upon his knee.

In another moment he looked up and muttered brokenly:

"He is dead!"

Dead! Raoul stood as if thunderstruck, and, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, a great wave of pity stole over him for the young man thus cut off in the prime of life by an accident, for accident it surely was.

Another blare of trumpets and a still louder pounding upon the door!

Raoul was roused from his sad revery by Mirza, who pulled him by the sleeve and pointed toward the window, whispering:

"Fly, chevalier, or you are lost. The guard are surrounding the house. There is only one way. The river!"

"A choice between fire and water! Mordiou! here goes for the water."

Hurriedly sheathing his sword, he snatched up his hat and ran lightly up the wooden staircase and out upon the balcony, just as Sergeant Goujon lifted the bar and admitted the soldiers of the guard, screaming to them as they poured in:

"The Duke de Bassompierre is killed! *There* is the assassin!"

The soldiers raised their muskets to fire upon the figure on the balcony, but Count Lemours, flinging himself between, thundered out:

"No, the duel was a fair one."

"Mille tonnerres! Would you save a heretic?" shrieked Goujon. "Death to the Huguenot!"

And snatching an arquebuse from one of the soldiers, he levelled it and fired.

Raoul turned, lifted his hat, from which the bullet had cut the feather, waved it defiantly, and leaped over the low parapet, plunging into the water below.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PORT IN A STORM.

The chevalier was an admirable swimmer, and, although considerably encumbered by his sword, which he refused to cast aside, he succeeded in reaching the Pont Neuf, and clambering up out of the water.

The bridge was only partially finished, but still passable for foot-passengers, and all about were strewn stones and lumber left by the workmen.

It was now quite dark, and the moon, which was near its full, had not yet risen.

Raoul was as wet and weary as a hunted rat, and he knew that there would be a tremendous hue and cry and that the chase would be a hot one. He had killed the Duke de Bassompierre, the owner of a great name and a powerful one, and, moreover, he himself was a Huguenot.

He looked about him and found that he was in about the middle of the bridge. Perhaps this would be as good a place as any to hide in for the present. So, wringing the water from his clothes as best he could, he crawled into a narrow opening between two stones, just beneath a recently completed parapet.

From his hiding-place he could hear shouts and see the flashing of torches along the quay. Now and then hurrying footsteps resounded over the bridge.

Suddenly, he was startled by the sound of voices just over his head. Two men had paused beside the parapet, and the fugitive soon discovered from their conver-

sation that they were the soldiers who had been with the sergeant at the Green Dragon.

"He can't escape!" said one.

"No, probably not," replied the other, with a slight Italian accent; "but he may let himself float down with the tide and land farther on."

"Impossible! The watch is out, and the banks of the river are alive with torches. Hear them!" as the sound of shouts and cries was borne on the night air. "By the mass! to hunt a heretic is rare sport."

"This particular heretic is a devil incarnate. By hilt and point! as the sergeant says, how he managed his rapier! Sa! sa! sa! And pouf! pouf! It makes my blood run cold to think of it."

"Ha! ha! Not so cold as that of the duke."

"The duke was a lad of mettle, a bully-boy, a night-roamer, who loved a lass and a glass."

"Pardi! He's gone. May the saints rest his soul! and many a gold piece goes with him! Griffo, here's some good Malvoisin in this flask. Let's drink to the confusion of all heretics, and especially this Huguenot equerry!"

But the sentiment was destined not to be drunk just then, at all events, for the colloquy of the two soldiers was abruptly interrupted.

"With a clink and a clank,
With a clink and a clank,
Here's more strength to the Catholic flail!"

hiccoughed a coarse voice to the accompaniment of unsteady footsteps and jingling scabbard.

"Here comes the sergeant," muttered Griffo.

"With a skin as full of wine as our Huguenot's must be of water."

Both statements were true, for the sergeant came staggering up to his two subordinates, his huge sword trailing behind him and continually getting between his legs.

"Curse the sword!" he mumbled, stumbling against the parapet. "I can't walk straight for it. When our very swords turn heretic, there's an end—hic—to the true religion."

"And a speedy downfall to its supporters," laughed Griffo.

Sergeant Goujon pulled himself together with an effort, and with a desperate attempt at dignity commanded:

"Soldiers, respect your superior officer. Where's the flask I told you to take from the table when they all —hic—ran out of the tavern?"

"Here, sergeant," replied Griffo, with evident reluctance.

"And yours, Mironton?"

"Here, sergeant."

"Good, very good," and he took a flask from each, to their intense disgust. "Always retain your—hic—presence of mind in face of an enemy. Now do you two guard the ends of the bridge, and the middle shall be my care. If any attempt to pass, shoot 'em down. Go!"

The disappointed soldiers glanced at each other, shrugged their shoulders, but were forced to obey, and the hidden Gascon heard them tramping off in opposite directions.

Then came the sounds of the popping of a cork and the gurgling of the liquor down Goujon's ever-thirsty throat.

"With a clink and a clank,
With a clink and a clank——"

"Sleepy as an owl—hic—rascally landlord—put laudanum in wine——"

Down plumped the brave watchman of the middle of the bridge with his back against one of the stones between which his prey was crouching, and soon his heavy snores told that he was safe in the land of Nod.

Raoul raised his head, made sure that the coast was clear, and crawled cautiously out of the uncomfortable shelter.

He stooped over and scrutinized Goujon attentively. Yes, he was fast asleep, as sound as a church. But what was the chevalier to do? Both ends of the bridge were guarded. There was little chance of escape. He was caught like a rat in a trap.

"More—more wine!" whimpered Goujon in his sleep.

"Peace, you wine-cask!" muttered De Puycadère. And then a sudden inspiration seized him. Yes, there *was* a chance, a bare one, but worth trying at all events. He bent over the snoring form and gently removed the hat and cloak. Then he carefully dragged the unconscious sergeant behind a buttress of the bridge.

Scarcely had he bestowed him safely out of sight, when a voice cried out from one end of the bridge:

"He climbed the parapet. I saw him. This way! This way!"

The chevalier had just time to slouch Goujon's hat over his eyes, hind-part before, so that the feather dangled over his face, and to arrange cloak and sword in a swaggering fashion, before Griffo came running up followed by two other soldiers and a man in the dress of a tradesman.

"Sergeant!" called Griffo, excitedly.

"Well—hic—what news?" returned Raoul, imitating

Goujon's voice as best he could, and lurching forward as if in an advanced stage of intoxication.

"A citizen swears he saw the Huguenot climbing one of the piers of the bridge."

"Bah! He's drunk. And to be drunk—hic—after curfew time is to be punishable by law. Take him to the guard-house and give him—hic—the strappado."

The stratagem was evidently working well. None of the four men seemed to have the least suspicion that it was not the sergeant who stood or rather staggered before them. Nevertheless Raoul realized that at any moment all might be discovered. He could distinctly hear Goujon's snores, and, moreover, the moon had risen and was flooding the scene with its soft light.

"But, sergeant," remonstrated Griffo.

"Not a word," broke in his soi-disant superior with a drunken flourish and swagger. "Respect your sergeant. When you've caught the heretic, bring him—hic—before me. I'll go to the tavern and sleep." And he reeled forward, the laughing soldiers making ready way for him.

"But, Griffo," he said, turning with a sudden lurch and almost upsetting the tradesman who was just behind him. "What's the password? I've—hic—forgotten it."

"Lorraine."

"Lorraine! hic—too good a name to come from a dry throat. I'll drink it in a bumper. Here's a health to the—hic—what do you call it? With a clink and a clank—with a——"

And he proceeded on his way, tottering from side to side, but still with eyes and ears open, and with one hand firmly clinched on the hilt of his sword, so that he could draw it at a moment's notice, should occasion

demand. For he was determined to sell his life dearly at all events.

"The sergeant carries his wine badly to-night," remarked Griffo to one of the tittering soldiers.

"Ma foi!" was the reply, "did you ever know the night when he carried it well?"

Back upon the still night air came the stumbling refrain:

"Here's a health to the Duke of Guise,
Here's a health to the—hic—Duke of Guise."

But the echoes had not died before the words were taken up in still more drunken tones, which seemed to the astounded Griffo to proceed from beneath his very feet:

"With a clink and a clank,
With a clink and a clank
Here's more strength to the—hic—Catholic flail."

With cries of surprise and terror the little group started back, their faces white in the moonlight.

The tradesman was the first to recover himself.

"There's some one concealed behind that buttress," he exclaimed, pointing to where protruded the buff boots of the sergeant.

Griffo darted forward and, seizing the boots, dragged into view the struggling figure of his superior officer.

"Mort de ma vie! It's the sergeant himself!" he cried. And then, as it flashed across him how thoroughly he had been duped, he screamed at the top of his voice: "And the Huguenot is escaping! After him, comrades!"

And away they all started, dragging the blinking, cursing sergeant with them, like a pack of hounds in full cry after their quarry.

. . . . . .

Raoul had not very much the start of them, as he had not dared to proceed very fast, for fear of being noticed, and, moreover, he had been stopped at the end of the bridge by a sentinel demanding the password.

Fortunately, thanks to his forethought, he was able to give it, but he had not gone a dozen steps from the sentinel, when the tumult on the bridge told him that his ruse had been discovered.

There was no time to lose. Gathering up his cloak, he started at a rapid pace down the quay and dashed into the first side street he came to.

His movement however was observed, as he soon became aware by the shouts, not a great distance behind him, of

"Death to the Huguenot! Death to the Huguenot!"

Turning his head as he ran, he saw that his pursuers must number at least a score, which was indeed the fact.

Fortunately for them and unfortunately for their prey, Griffo and his companions had stumbled upon Count Lemours and his friends, who were still pursuing the search.

All thought of making a stand at once vanished from the chevalier's mind. The numbers of his pursuers were far too great for him to do so with any hope of success.

There was but one thing to be done—to find some place of asylum. But where?

He darted down a side street, doubled and came back upon the quay again. But the stratagem was not a success. His would-be captors were still at his heels, not two hundred yards away.

He found himself in front of an imposing mansion, with armorial bearings above the door which showed that it belonged to one of the nobility.

A light was burning in a window on the second floor.

The wall was covered with ivy.

Instantly his plan was formed. He would attempt to reach the window and throw himself upon the mercy of the occupant or occupants of the room.

At this juncture, to think was to act.

Grasping the ivy, and clinging with hands and feet, he clambered up and succeeded in reaching the balcony.

Had he been discovered?

To this question time alone, and a short time at that, could give the answer.

CHAPTER XV.

MADAME LA DUCHESSE DE BASSOMPIERRE.

On the evening of the unfortunate duel at the Green Dragon, there had taken place a stormy scene at the Hôtel de Bassompierre, the participants being Mademoiselle Gabrielle de Vrissac and her guardians Vicomte Hector de Vrissac and the Duchess de Bassompierre.

Since the feast of Saint Bartholomew, the maid of honor's duties at the Louvre had been slight. There were no longer fêtes and merrymaking. The King and Queen of Navarre were in retirement, although it can well be imagined that, after the betrayal of his party and his own narrow escape from death, the fertile brain of Henri was not idle in plotting and planning for his own ultimate success.

The court of France was no less gloomy. The king thought no longer of tennis, and although what the queen-mother had called "the enemies of himself and his kingdom" had been summarily dealt with and the King of Navarre himself forced to accept the mass, Charles, weak and puerile, was in a state of abject terror.

He feared everybody and trusted no one, hiding in his closet, surrounded by armed men, bathed in the perspiration of fear and covering his face at night, declaring that the air was full of the spirits of the restless dead.

The days succeeding the massacre had been terrible ones for Mademoiselle de Vrissac, alternating as she did

between hope and fear as to the fate of her Huguenot lover.

No word had come from him, but finally on the fourth day her heart was lightened by a note from Queen Marguerite (who, even in the midst of her own troubles found time to think of her friends), telling her that she had learned from Ambrose Pare of the chevalier's safety.

A prayer of thanksgiving went up from the young girl's heart, but her peace of mind was destined to be of but short duration.

Not an hour after receiving word from the queen she was summoned to her aunt's apartment, there to meet the frowning face of her cousin Hector.

There in the presence of the distressed duchess, he gave a garbled account of his meeting with De Puycadère and produced Gabrielle's handkerchief, which the reader will remember was torn from the chevalier's arm by the sword of the vicomte.

"As your guardian, I demand an explanation," said De Vrissac, after he had completed his story, "an explanation as to how your handkerchief came into possession of this beggarly adventurer."

Gabrielle had turned cold with horror at the account of the chevalier's disappearance, until she remembered that the queen had said that he was safe the night before.

At her cousin's words, all the pride of her race rose up within her, and she faced the angry vicomte with her dainty head upreared and her eyes looking fearlessly into his.

"No adventurer!" she said, "but of blood equal to our own, a De Puycadère, and equerry to the King of Navarre."

"Add, and the lover of Mademoiselle de Vrissac," sneered the vicomte.

"That and more—the man I love, the man to whom I have plighted my troth!"

These bold words brought consternation to the duchess and a murderous rage to the vicomte. For a moment he felt as if he could strike the girl dead at his feet.

Before he could find his tongue, the duchess spoke:

"Child! child!" she said, half indignantly, half sorrowfully. "Is it possible that you love this man? A Huguenot? An enemy to our faith? A rebel to the king!"

"Surely you forget, madame," replied Gabrielle proudly, "that my father was of the reformed church, and his union with my mother, your sister, a Catholic, was a happy one. Nor is the Chevalier de Puycadère a rebel, when he wears the colors of the King of Navarre, whose subject alone he is."

Little as she witted of it, Mademoiselle de Vrissac had in these words struck a responsive chord in her aunt's breast. Although her life with the late duke had been a thoroughly happy one and she had had both respect and a warm affection for her husband, the duchess had never forgotten the gallant young Huguenot who had touched so deeply her maiden heart, nor the agony she had suffered in silence when she found her sister preferred to herself.

But the effect upon the Vicomte de Vrissac was something totally different. Gabrielle's speech inflamed his jealous rage into something akin to madness.

"We shall see!" he hissed between his clenched teeth. "You are not your own mistress, mademoiselle. And your experience at court, if the Prince of Béarn's

can be called a court, has not improved you. To-morrow back you go to Vrissac, there to remain until you recover your senses! Bah! you do well to recall the memory of my late uncle, who was the one stain upon our honor. A traitor, a renegade, a——"

"Silence!" And the duchess stood before him pale with anger. "Not one word more, Monsieur le Vicomte! Your uncle was a courteous gentleman, which his nephew is not! And one thing more. Remember that I am also mademoiselle's guardian, and, in arranging her life, you must reckon with me. No more! We will discuss this matter at another time. Good-night, Monsieur le Vicomte."

With a face as black as night and almost foaming at the mouth in his anger, Monsieur de Vrissac turned on his heel, and, without parting salutation, flung himself furiously out of the room.

Both the duchess and Gabrielle breathed more freely after his departure.

After a pause, the duchess turned to her niece, drew her toward her and kissed her on the forehead.

"You little heretic," she murmured, gently, "at your age, there is but one religion, that of the heart."

"Then you give your consent?" asked Gabrielle, eagerly.

"I do not say that. But I will inquire further concerning this Chevalier de Puycadère, and then—we shall see. We shall see."

Into Gabrielle's beautiful eyes came the light of love and hope, that light that never was on land or sea, and she would have overwhelmed her aunt with her gratitude.

But the latter affectionately cut her short.

"Nay, nay," she said. "'Tis too soon. We shall

see. Now leave me, my child, for my heart is heavy, and I would be alone. But first draw the curtains and shut out the light from the streets."

Gabrielle obeyed, and as the heavy curtains screened the great window, closing out the moonlight, the room became in deep shadow, only a small part of it being dimly lighted by the silver lamp which burned before the altar.

"Good-night, madame," said Gabrielle, respectfully.

She moved toward the door, and then paused and, as if influenced by a sudden impulse, retraced her steps.

"You are not offended with me, dear aunt?" she asked, timidly.

"Offended! Dear child!"

The duchess extended her arms, and Gabrielle in a burst of girlish tenderness threw herself into her embrace.

"Good-night and sweet repose, ma tante."

"Repose!" murmured the duchess bitterly, as the graceful figure vanished from her sight. "Repose!"

And, indeed, of late, the poor woman had known but little of it. Catholic though she was and devoted to her faith, the recent scenes that had disgraced her native city and brought down upon king and country the reprobation of all Christendom, had horrified and revolted her. Although she knew that the idea of the massacre neither originated with nor was encouraged by the clerical element in Paris or elsewhere; that it was to be attributed to that spirit of bitter hatred and resentment which characterizes all races to a greater or less degree, and that the Huguenots themselves had already in several instances been guilty of the massacre of Catholics, still her soul was sick and ashamed within her.

Moreover, she had another reason for grief and anxiety of a more personal nature. Her son, her only son, was exposed to danger, to more than usual danger now that Riot sat with the king upon his throne and Murder red-handed stalked the streets.

As the duchess indulged in these gloomy reflections, a commotion rising in the street below and gradually approaching nearer and nearer was calculated in no degree to allay her fears.

She listened with beating heart, and throwing herself upon her knees upon the velvet cushion in front of the prie-dieu, she raised her eyes imploringly to the crucifix above the little altar, and breathed forth a prayer that God and the saints would protect her son.

As slowly she bowed her head over her clasped hands, the window curtains were torn aside and Raoul de Pucaydère, exhausted and breathless, staggered into the room.

The duchess, absorbed in her devotions, heard nothing, nor did the chevalier at first perceive her. He had escaped for the moment the wolves who were howling for his blood, and, perhaps, by climbing the balcony baffled them entirely.

But whither had his fears led him? The house, from all appearances, must belong to one of rank and wealth.

Just then his eyes fell upon the kneeling woman, and he could not repress an expression of surprise.

In bewilderment and alarm the duchess started to her feet, overturning as she did so the lamp upon the altar, and leaving the room in darkness save for the pale moonbeams that filtered through the curtains.

"Who's there?" she cried hoarsely. "Without there! Marie! Charlotte!"

But before she could reach the door to summon aid,

Raoul, guided by the sound of her voice, had thrown himself before her.

"Madame, madame, do not call!" he implored. "In the name of that charity which is the blessed prerogative of your sex, do not call."

The duchess paused, hesitated a moment, and there was no tremor in her voice as she demanded haughtily:

"Who are you that under cover of the night enters thus like a thief into my chamber? Who are you?"

"One most unfortunate," was the sorrowful answer.

The uproar in the street was increasing, and Raoul realized that if his ascent of the balcony had been perceived, there was no time to be lost.

"Gracious lady," he proceeded, hurriedly, "for the very accent of your voice proclaims your rank, my life is in your hands."

"Your life!"

"Yes. I found myself involved, by no fault of my own, in a tavern brawl, and by accident rather than design, I——"

He hesitated. Even at such a moment the brutal words were hard to speak, especially to a woman.

"Well, sir?"

"I killed my adversary."

"Killed!"

And involuntarily the duchess retreated a step, an action which was not lost upon the over-wrought chevalier.

"Ah, madame," he exclaimed with passionate intensity, "let me appeal to all that is womanly in you. It was in defence of one of your own sex, a wanderer, it is true, a Bohemian, poor and defenceless—defenceless but for me. I rescued her from insult, from worse than insult, and—and—I have told the rest."

He paused. There was something in his accent that almost convinced the duchess of his sincerity.

"The man is dead?" she said, after a moment.

"I left him on the tavern floor," replied Raoul. "He stirred my blood beyond the power of control. Were there but light enough to see my face, your own eyes could bear witness to the coward mark his glove has left upon my cheek."

"He struck you."

"Aye, and with words as injurious as his blow."

The clamor outside was now directly beneath the window, and the red glare of torches shimmered fitfully upon the curtains.

"They are there, madame," murmured Raoul, desperately, "beneath your balcony. It is for you to give or to refuse the feast of blood."

"What is it you demand?" she asked, abruptly.

"Protection! Your house is now my only sanctuary, and the altar I would cling to is your mercy."

"You plead well."

"I plead for life. Ah, madame, bethink you, is there no life dear to you, that chance may place in a similar peril? A husband? A son?"

The duchess started violently. A son? Heaven forbid that Paul should be in such danger! And yet who could tell? Perhaps the succor now demanded of her by this stranger her own son might one day stand in need of. At this thought all hesitation vanished.

"No more, monsieur, no more," she said in great agitation. "I believe your story. Give me your hand."

And she led him toward the head of the bed and pushed aside the hangings. "Conceal yourself behind these curtains, and, when hidden, stir not. Should

any, as you think they will do, penetrate into this house, they will credit my denial and search no further."

Raoul raised the hand he held to his lips and something suspiciously like a tear dropped upon it.

"Be of comfort, monsieur," said the duchess, softly. "I pledge my word, *my sacred word*, that, whatever betide, you shall leave this house in safety. I swear it!"

And she stretched out her hand toward the white crucifix, which glimmered ghost-like through the gloom.

Raoul drew the hangings about him, and his benefactress turned away.

Not a moment too soon! Already there was a hurried knocking at the door, which in another second was thrown open, and several of the Provost's Guard, led by Count Lemours, Sergeant Goujon, and Griffo, entered tumultuously.

But they halted in confusion and uncovered their heads, as the light of their torches fell upon the duchess, who stood confronting them, her figure drawn to its full height and her whole attitude haughty and commanding.

"What means this intrusion?" she demanded, coldly. "Ah! you are the Count Lemours, I believe. Tell me by what right this drunken rabble have dared to cross the threshold of my house? Be sure, monsieur, my son will exact a strict account from him whose boldness may have counselled this intrusion."

Lemours advanced a little, the deepest respect, sympathy, and sorrow depicted on every lineament of his countenance.

"Madame la Duchesse," he said, falteringly, "it is on the duke's account alone that—that——"

"Speak on, monsieur," broke in the duchess, impatiently.

"I—I dare not.

"*Dare* not!"

"I bring but woeful tidings."

The duchess advanced close to the wretched count and fixed her burning eyes upon his, as if she would wrest the truth from his very soul. The delicate old face flushed crimson, and then grew pale and rigid as marble.

"Woeful tidings," she gasped, each word a manifest effort. "Of whom? My son? Where is he—why do you look at each other, and— He is dead! Do not speak! I read it in your eyes! My boy is dead!"

She staggered back, and, resting against a table, clasped her hands above her heart. Dead! dead! and she still lived! Her eyes wandered fitfully about the room, and, as often happens when every other faculty seems paralyzed by some sudden shock of grief, each petty detail burned itself indelibly upon her memory.

As her wandering glance fell upon the bed, the curtains trembled slightly. She started as one awaking from a terrible dream, and made a step toward the bed, then halted abruptly.

At this moment, with that fatuousness which makes fools rush in where angels fear to tread, Goujon sputtered out in his thick voice:

"By the mass, Madame la Duchesse, but 'tis your son's murderer we seek. May I never empty wine-flask again but I saw the Calvinistic dog enter by this window."

A shudder ran over the duchess' frame. Her lips moved, but no sound issued forth.

"With these two eyes I saw him."

The afflicted woman swayed slightly and seemed about to sink to the ground, but as Lemours sprang for-

ward to assist her, she recovered herself and waved him back. Here was no woman to weep and wail, but a *grande dame* from the crown of her snowy head to the tip of her dainty foot. The deepest emotion knows no voice to express itself. A Du Barri shrieks upon the scaffold, but a De Rohan dies mute.

"How was he killed?" she asked in hollow tones, addressing Lemours. "By what base sleight of hand was my boy's life struck out?"

"Madame, I must needs speak the truth," returned Lemours, gravely. "The duke was killed in a fair duel."

"And the cause? What was the cause? Answer quickly, monsieur!"

Lemours, with lowered eyes, was silent.

"Enough, it will not bear the telling."

A terrible struggle was going on in the duchess' breast. She had but to stretch out her hand, and the man who killed her son would be in the hands of justice. Vengeance was knocking at her heart, but she dare not give it entrance. She had sworn that, whatever betide, the man who claimed the asylum of her roof should go thence in safety. *Noblesse oblige!* A Bassompierre keeps his word.

"Count de Lemours," she said slowly, "I thank you, but must entreat you to retire and take these men with you. This drunkard," with a contemptuous movement of her hand toward Goujon, "this drunkard speaks out of the wine he has drunk. For—for *this* time the assassin has escaped. Go, monsieur, go; I claim the sanctuary of sorrow."

As slowly and quietly as they had entered hurriedly and tumultuously, Lemours and his companions left the room.

The door closed softly behind them, and for a moment, intense silence reigned in the apartment.

Then, averting her head from the bed behind the curtains of which Raoul was hidden, the duchess spoke:

"Miserable man, come forth. But cover your face lest meeting you hereafter I should know you and exact the penalty. I will keep the oath I have sworn. Go forth! You are free."

Slowly Raoul emerged from his hiding-place, his cloak held before his face and his whole frame shaken with noiseless sobs.

"Let neither fear nor gratitude betray you," continued the duchess in the same emotionless tones. "I have kept my word, but if chance discover you within the walls of Paris after morning dawns, I stand between you and death no longer."

Without a word, Raoul, more miserable than he had ever been in his life, groped his way across the room.

But before he could reach the door, it was suddenly opened, and the white-robed figure of Mademoiselle de Vrissac appeared, holding a lamp above her head.

With a low cry, Raoul dropped his cloak and involuntarily sank upon one knee, almost imagining that he was in the presence of some celestial visitor.

The light fell full upon his upturned face.

"It is he!" cried Gabrielle, half wonderingly, half joyfully. "Raoul de Puycadère! My betrothed!"

But between them swept the stately figure of the duchess, stern and inexorable as Fate itself, and from her pallid lips fell slowly, one by one, the icy words which withered all the blossoming hopes of Gabrielle's young heart:

"*And the murderer of my son!*"

CHAPTER XVI.

IN FROCK AND COWL.

"You are mad, Master Raoul, you are mad, thus to thrust your head within the lion's jaws! Here you are safe, but nowhere else in this accursed city of Paris!"

The speaker was Simon Beppa, the landlord of the "Green Dragon," and the person addressed Raoul de Puycadère, who, in the dress of a Cordelier monk, a brown robe fastened with a rope around the waist, stood listening with an obstinate smile about his lips.

It was a strange place the two men were in—the cellar of a house which had long since been razed to the ground. A flight of crumbling steps led down to it from the quay, and one side had been knocked away to give access to the river. The walls were reeking with green slime, and ever and anon a frightened rat darted across the uneven floor and sped away into the darkness.

Yet, such as it was, it was a place of refuge for the hunted Huguenot.

After the terrible revelation which had been made to him in the duchess' palace, Raoul had staggered forth from the presence of the woman he loved, knowing nothing and caring less of what might become of him.

As he made his way along the silent quay, more dead than alive, his senses in a maze, he was roused from his

abstraction by a light touch upon the arm, and, raising his eyes, he saw before him the gypsy girl, Mirza, attended by her lover, Pharos.

"Monsieur, why are you here?" she said, timorously. "It is not safe, oh, it is not safe! Come with me, monsieur, I implore you."

Raoul looked at her with blank eyes, but made no reply. He did not resist, however, the gentle pressure of her hand, but allowed himself to be led to the cellar by the river-side, which wretched place served as a temporary abode for the Tzigani.

Once here, he sank down upon a pile of sacks, and, worn out by all he had passed through that day, almost immediately sank into a deep and dreamless sleep.

When he awoke, the morning was far advanced, and, refreshed as he was, his splendid vitality reasserted itself, and things looked by no means so dark as they had done.

After all, where was he so much to blame? His adversary had been killed in a fair duel, and entirely through the fault of his own impetuosity. If Gabrielle loved him, she would surely forgive. But, one thing he was resolved—he would see her at all costs before leaving for La Rochelle.

There were still twenty-four hours before him ere he was to start on the king's mission. The packet and his little store of gold, which had been sewn into his doublet, were safe.

But how could he bring about an interview with Gabrielle? After much cogitation, he finally decided to take Mirza into his confidence.

The gypsy girl, excited and greatly flattered, promised to do all in her power, and would loiter about the Hôtel de Bassompierre all the day in order to try to

obtain a glimpse of and a word with Mademoiselle de Vrissac.

Pharos was dispatched to bring a disguise and also to carry word to Simon Beppa of the chevalier's safety.

Although it seemed hours to the waiting Raoul, it was really a very short time before the gypsy returned, bringing with him the monk's robe, and, accompanied by Simon Beppa, the faithful.

To all good Simon's remonstrances, however, but a deaf ear was turned by De Puycadère, who by this time had almost entirely recovered his native fund of audacity and good spirits.

"Mordiou! you old croaker," he said, cutting short the innkeeper. "Beneath this cowl I shall be as safe as in the Château de Puycadère itself. See that the horse is in readiness at daybreak to-morrow, but meanwhile I'm my own master and see her I must and *will*."

Simon shook his head in despair.

"Yes, it's of no use," laughed Raoul. "Remember your youth, good Simon. Were you never in love?"

"With a bottle of Rhenish or a roasted pullet, yes," growled the innkeeper.

"Why, you old heretic! Have no fear, I'll——"

But he was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Mirza, flushed and eager.

In an instant, Raoul saw that she had some news for him.

"Hist, monsieur, hist!"

"What is it, Mirza? What is it?" he cried, hastening to the side of the panting girl.

"I have bribed the gardener of the Hôtel de Bassompierre. Here is the key of the water-gate."

"How shall I thank you!"

"But that is not all. Madame de Bassompierre, accompanied by Mademoiselle de Vrissac, goes this morning to the church of Saint Germain to attend a mass for the repose of the soul of—of——"

"I understand. And I will be there!"

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Mirza and Simon simultaneously.

"The danger, Monsieur le Chevalier!"

"The danger! Pouf! I burrow no longer here like a mole underground. Within an hour, I shall see *her*, speak to her perhaps! And then—what matters the afterward? Mordiou! I will not look beyond so great a happiness!"

"A wilful man must have his way," sighed Beppa.

"Your love must indeed be great, monsieur, to risk so much," said Mirza, a little wistfully, wondering, perhaps, if Pharos would be as devoted to her.

"For her I would risk all!" exclaimed Raoul rapturously. "My little Mirza, I shall never forget your goodness. But for you and your friends, I might have been in the Chatelet long ere this. But tell me, how may I reward your generous aid? I feel that what I would offer is insufficient to——"

He had taken out his purse, but Mirza drew quickly back, and with a gesture absolutely queen-like in its dignity, waved aside the proffered recompense.

"We are Bohemians, Monsieur le Chevalier," she said proudly, her little head erect and a slight flush tinging the dusky hue of her cheek, "but we have hearts beneath our frippery and rags. After what you have done for me, there is not one of the children of Egypt but would peril life and limb to do you service, while all would resent as insult the mention of payment or reward. Pardon me, monsieur, if I speak strongly, but

I feel strongly, and, though we do not worship at the same altar, I will pray for you and *her.*"

With a twinge of honest shame, the chevalier thrust his purse back into his doublet, and, taking the little dark hand, he raised it respectfully, almost humbly, to his lips.

In another moment he was gone.

With bent head, cowl drawn well down over his eyes and his hands hidden in the sleeves of his gown, he proceeded slowly down the quay, until he reached the Grande Esplanade of the Louvre.

It was a fête day, and the splendid square was thronged. The beggars and gypsies, among whom Raoul recognized Pharos and Ismael, were reaping a rich harvest.

The chevalier threaded the maze, the people making way right and left for the monk, until he came to the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, upon the steps of which he seated himself with bowed head, as if absorbed in pious meditation.

From the open door of the church came the melancholy notes of the dirge for the dead, and the solemn

Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis!

mingled with the gay

Holà! Zi! za! Holà!

of the gypsy dance, forming a strange and bizarre effect.

Close to the church, at the right of where Raoul was sitting, was a stone pillar on a sort of platform consisting of two steps.

This pillar was one of those from which proclamations were delivered and then afterward attached.

Suddenly the roll of a drum and the flourish of a

trumpet broke upon the air, interrupting the gypsy revels and causing the dancers to scatter in disorder.

Then in a heavy voice, which Raoul recognized, causing him to draw his cowl still lower over his face, came the words:

"Back! Stand back, all of you! Griffo, drive me in a few of these rascals' ribs with the butt end of your arquebuse, and do you, Mironton, break yon fat fellow's head that he may learn modesty and keep himself in smaller compass. By the beard of Saint Bridget, I'll teach the varlets wisdom!"

The crowd parted, and in the pathway thus formed appeared Sergeant Annibal Goujon, accompanied by half a score of soldiers, and followed by a gayly caparisoned crier on horseback with two attendants in the city livery.

The crier rode up to the column, and, reining in his horse, faced the people.

"Silence, citizens!"

"Hats off!" roared the sergeant, with a flourish of his sword.

In a twinkling all hats and caps were doffed, and the crier proceeded to read the following proclamation:

"*Proclamation!—We, Charles, by the grace of God, King of France, do hereby order the payment of five hundred golden crowns to such person or persons as shall deliver into the custody of the Provost of this good city of Paris the body of one Raoul, Chevalier de Puycadère, heretic and assassin, alive or dead. God save the King!*"

And the crier, after affixing the paper to the column, rode away to repeat the performance at the next street corner.

Sergeant Goujon and the soldiers followed, the ser-

geant's avaricious fingers itching for the possession of the reward.

"Those Huguenots are pestilent," observed a woman standing near Raoul.

"The more the merrier," replied another. "We'll dose them with a second Bartholomew."

"By holy mass! but the chevalier must be of the boldest to kill so great a seigneur."

"He stabbed him from behind, Sergeant Goujon says."

"Ay, and would have killed many another, but the sergeant struck in, and made the heretic take to cold water."

"A brave man, the sergeant!"

"But a quarrelsome. Let's follow the crier."

"Ay! It's a rare sport, this hunting heretics."

And the two gossips toddled away to satisfy their greed for excitement.

Through it all, the supposed monk had maintained his statue-like attitude upon the church steps, but now a slight noise within the sacred edifice itself caused him cautiously to turn his head.

The mass was over.

Half a dozen retainers in the Bassompierre livery came first, and then a black-robed figure, wearing a heavy wimple which concealed her features, slowly descended the steps. Last came, with downcast eyes, the lady of Raoul's heart. Just as the sombre-robed form reached the foot of the steps, the voice of the crier was heard:

"Five hundred golden crowns for the arrest of Raoul, Chevalier de Puycadère, alive or dead."

The wimple was thrown back, and from beneath the shadow of his cowl the chevalier gazed upon the white

face of the duchess, growing sterner and harder as she listened.

Her lips moved, and Raoul saw rather than heard the words:

"Dead or alive! Dead! ay, far better dead, for my son shall be avenged."

The duchess, preceded by her servants, moved away, and the graceful, sad-eyed girl, who followed her, was now close at Raoul's side.

He rose to his feet, and, raising his cowl with one hand so as to show his face, breathed the word:

"Gabrielle!"

"Raoul!" And Mademoiselle de Vrissac, pale as marble, paused, her startled eyes resting upon his face.

"One word! But one!" he pleaded. "I must speak to you."

But Mademoiselle de Vrissac, her hand pressed convulsively to her heart, made no response.

"I will be at the water gate of the Bassompierre gardens within half an hour," continued Raoul, with rapid and passionate entreaty. "Will you meet me, Gabrielle? *Will* you? I must speak to you. I *must*. Do not deny me! It is my last request, my last."

"Your last," murmured Gabrielle, faintly.

"Listen," replied the chevalier, bitterly.

And as if uttering words of doom, the voice of the crier fell upon their aching hearts:

"Five hundred crowns for the arrest of Raoul, Chevalier de Puycadère, dead or alive."

Gabrielle shuddered.

"You will meet me," and he endeavored to take her hand. But she withdrew it hastily, and with a slight gesture of warning, whispered:

"The duchess!"

Madame de Bassompierre had turned and was approaching them.

Raoul hastily drew his cowl well over his face.

"Benedicite, holy father," said the duchess, as the apparent monk bowed low before her. "I would purchase your prayers not for myself, but," with an effort, "for my son."

As she spoke, she drew a purse from a pocket that hung at her girdle and placed it in Raoul's hands.

Then taking Gabrielle's arm as if for support, she moved slowly away.

The chevalier watched the two retreating figures, hoping, but in vain, for one backward glance from the blue eyes he loved so well.

The purse slipped from his unresisting fingers and fell with a clatter upon the stone step.

He was startled by a heavy hand falling with a clap upon his back, and Sergeant Goujon's voice rumbled in his ear:

"Holà! holy father, how long is it since frock and cowl have grown so careless of the good things of this world as to leave a well-filled purse lying idle in the streets?"

And he stooped and picked up the purse in question, jingling the gold pieces merrily.

Realizing his danger the chevalier attempted to pass on, but Goujon caught him by his frock.

"Nay, nay, holy father," he protested, in a chuckling tone. "Why such haste? The hour of matins is past. Let us away to a wine-shop, and spend a gold piece of the duchess' alms upon a good fat capon and a flagon of the best."

"Such carnal pleasures are not for me, my son," returned Raoul, assuming the voice of old age, and at

the same time disengaging himself from the sergeant's unwelcome clutch.

But Goujon was not so easily to be gotten rid of. He made another grab at the frock, and demanded with swaggering impertinence:

"Not for you, most reverend sir; and why not, pray?"

"Begone!" exclaimed Raoul, impatiently, vainly endeavoring to pass.

"What! a monk and refuse good wine!" snickered his tormentor. "A monk and care nothing for a pair of bright eyes and a neat-turned ankle! You are a disgrace to beads and breviary! You are a shame to your order!"

Raoul shook roughly off the detaining hand upon his shoulder. His anger was rapidly rising, but he managed to contain it sufficiently to continue the use of the assumed voice as he said:

"You miserable rascal! Let me pass, or——"

"Rascal!" interrupted Goujon, clapping his hand to his sword-hilt with a vast show of bravado, but still with something of the sneak peeping through it all. "Rascal! I am Annibal Goujon, sergeant of the king's musketeers and terror of the Huguenots! My soldiers know me as the best friend of the grave-diggers!—a wader in gore!—a blood-drinker! When my sword is out, men turn their backs, and the only thing my enemy refuses to show me is his face!"

And he plucked at the cowl as if to raise it. The chevalier stepped back, but it was too late. The sergeant had obtained a glimpse of his face, and recoiled in open-eyed astonishment and fear.

The chevalier saw the danger, and sought too late to rectify his mistake.

"Go, go, my son," he said quickly, again simulating the accents of age. "And keep the purse. It may stay thy fingers from cutting one."

"Adieu, holy father," snarled Goujon, still keeping a safe distance. "We shall meet again where not even frock and cowl shall protect you."

And he strode away, but there was an evil glare of triumph in his little ferret-like eyes, which, had Raoul seen, would have served as a further warning to him.

As it was, the chevalier was far from being at ease. Did the villain suspect? He feared so; and then there was the reward to quicken his zeal. Five hundred crowns! Raoul glanced up at the paper affixed to the column.

"Mordiou!" he thought. "His Majesty of France values the poor Huguenot at a good round sum!"

"Hist! Monsieur—I mean, holy father."

It was Mirza, the Tzigana.

"Have you seen her?" she whispered.

"Yes. I shall go to the water gate in half an hour."

"I will be there, monsieur, in case of danger, and with those who are determined to avert it."

Before Raoul could reply, she was gone.

He adjusted his gown and prepared to depart for the quay. But, before he could take a step, the square seemed as if by magic to fill with people, and a platoon of soldiers advanced on the run.

Behind them, puffing and blowing, came Sergeant Goujon.

Before the chevalier could realize what was about to happen, Goujon had run up the steps of the pillar, and was yelling at the top of his voice:

"Comrades! Citizens! And all good Catholics! Seize the heretic!"

And he pointed at Raoul, who, not three paces away, had paused in alarm and surprise.

"The monk!" said one of the soldiers. "Your wits are in the wine-pot, sergeant!"

"The monk is no monk!" shrieked Goujon, striking the proclamation with his fist. "It is Raoul de Puycadère, the Huguenot! Five hundred crowns! It is I who have captured him! Bring him along with you, alive or dead!"

Raoul saw that further dissimulation was useless.

"It shall be dead, then!" he cried, flinging off the monk's frock and dashing it to the ground.

At the same time, he drew the dagger from his belt. His sword he had unfortunately left in Simon Beppa's care.

The soldiers made a rush forward, but, as they did so, one of the gypsies raised a whistle to his lips and blew a shrill note. Instantly it was answered by a burst of music, and a large band of Bohemians and beggars swept down between the soldiers and their would-be victim. They waved their batons and clashed their tambourines in the faces of Goujon and his companions, who were endeavoring to penetrate the moving hedge.

Raoul saw his opportunity and turned to fly, only to come face to face with Count Lemours.

The latter recognized the Huguenot at once and flung himself upon him.

Before Raoul could extricate himself from the unexpected grasp, the soldiers had broken through the ranks of the gypsies.

In another moment the Huguenot, on whose head there was a price of five hundred crowns, was in the hands of the king's guards.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I EXACT THE PRICE OF BLOOD."

THE horror of Mademoiselle de Vrissac at the announcement that her cousin had fallen at the hands of her lover can better be fancied than described.

At one fell swoop all her hopes of happiness fell in ruins. Never could she dream of marrying the man who had brought this grievous sorrow upon her and her family.

And yet she could not thrust Raoul from her heart. She found herself thinking more of him and his danger than of the dead cousin to whom, in spite of his faults, she had been sincerely attached.

Sudden as had been the growth of the love which had taken possession of her whole being, it was firmly rooted and could not be uptorn. If it were now impossible for her to become the young Gascon's wife, at least she would live and die his widow.

When Raoul appeared suddenly before her in the guise of the Cordelier monk, she had been too amazed and terrified to collect her senses. But on the way back to the Hôtel de Bassompierre, she resolved, in spite of a feeling of disloyalty to the stricken woman, who leaned so heavily upon her, to grant his request. For the last time, he had said. For the last time!

So, as soon as she could leave the duchess, she hurried to the gardens, accompanied by Dame Brigitte, to whom she had given a few hasty words of explanation.

The old lady was full of forebodings, but she was too devoted to her young mistress and too accustomed to yield to her imperious will to say her nay.

Ten minutes, twenty minutes, thirty minutes passed, and still no sign of the chevalier!

The sun was already low in the heavens, and the trees threw heavy shadows across the somewhat gloomy garden.

Tortured by anxiety and fear, Gabrielle paced restlessly up and down the walk which led from the house to the water-gate.

Three-quarters of an hour! What had happened?

At last Dame Brigitte ventured to remonstrate.

"If the duchess should discover your absence——"

Gabrielle sighed. Yes, it was useless to remain longer. And yet, she would give half her life to know that the chevalier was in safety.

"You are right, nurse," she said, nervously. "I dare not linger."

But, before she could make a movement to return to the house, a figure glided from out the shadow of the trees, and confronted her in the rapidly increasing dusk.

With a low cry, Gabrielle started back.

"Do not be alarmed, gracious lady," said a woman's voice. "It is only I, Mirza the gypsy."

On the return of the duchess from church, through an oversight of the servants the gate of the garden had been left open, which gave an opportunity for Mirza, with Pharos and three or four of his companions, to slip in and conceal themselves in order to be in readiness should any danger threaten the chevalier.

They had left the Grande Esplanade of the Louvre before the arrival of the soldiers, and therefore knew nothing of the Huguenot's capture.

Seeing that the intruder was a woman, Mademoiselle de Vrissac recovered her composure.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, haughtily.

Mirza raised her eyes imploringly to the beautiful face which was regarding her with such proud questioning.

"Oh, mademoiselle," she said, entreatingly, "do not repent of a kindness promised to one who braves even death itself for a few minutes' speech with you."

"Death! Ah, what miserable cause could have led Raoul de Puycadère to draw sword in a quarrel that has separated us for ever!"

The Tzigana hesitated, and then she said sadly and with an effort:

"Alas! That miserable cause was myself."

"You!" ejaculated Gabrielle, recoiling, with a pang of jealousy at her heart.

A bitter smile crossed Mirza's comely features.

"Yes, I," she said, with an intensity of feeling born of long and unjust persecution of her race. "I, a poor Bohemian, a dancer for money in the public streets—the cause was no more than that. But in her sore distress, she claimed his aid; he saw only a *woman*—a woman outraged, helpless, and alone."

Gabrielle's heart was touched. Moved by a sudden impulse, she took the gypsy's hand in her own white one, and said with a gentle humility that became her well:

"Forgive me! He had been less than man had he refused his aid."

Tears stood in the Tzigana's dark eyes, and from that moment her devotion was given to Gabrielle equally as to the chevalier. She would have died for either of them.

"You have a noble heart, lady," she faltered. "Ah, you can never know what it is to excite passion that is only an insult and love that knows no respect. You——"

But the words were cut short by the sound of approaching footsteps just without the garden wall, and a coarse voice trolling out:

"With a clink and a clank,
With a clink and a clank,
Here's more strength to the Catholic flail."

And in another moment a hand was placed upon the latch of the gate.

Mirza caught Mademoiselle de Vrissac by the arm.

"Quick! quick! Retire!" she whispered, excitedly. "It is not the chevalier!"

Before Gabrielle could recover from her astonishment, she was pushed within the shadow of a buttress of the house, where the frightened Dame Brigitte had already taken refuge.

The movement was only just in time. The gate opened and gave access to Annibal Goujon.

The worthy sergeant, for a wonder, was comparatively sober and seemed to be in high glee.

The Huguenot chevalier was captured at last, and Goujon could hear in anticipation the gold crowns clinking in his pocket.

But this was not all. He had only to manage the duchess properly and his fortune was made. She ought to prove a very Pactolus of wealth.

As soon as he saw the chevalier safely immured in the Grand Chatelet, Goujon proceeded with all haste to the Hôtel de Bassompierre, in order to be the first to inform the duchess of the fact.

He took care to tell no one of his intentions, least of all his boon companions, Griffo and Mironton. The mean wretches were too avaricious, he reflected, and would think no more of asking for shares than Goujon himself would of calling for a flask of wine.

As we have seen, the water gate was open, and the sergeant found no difficulty in entering.

As he advanced up the path, he caught sight of Mirza, who with petticoat thrown over her head was attempting to avoid his observation.

"Stop! Stop!" he cried, hurrying forward as quickly as his bulky form would permit. "Stop a minute while one of the king's officers sees what sort of a dove it is that flies in the darkness."

Mirza, fearing lest Mademoiselle de Vrissac should be discovered, chose the lesser of the evils and advanced to meet the sergeant.

"Who are you?" asked the latter.

"A servant of the house of Bassompierre," replied Mirza, with averted head.

"Good. So am I at present, its most obedient humble servant. That should make a sympathy between us. By your voice, you are young, and I dare swear not ugly. Why so coy?"

And he laid his hand upon her shoulder. But, quick as a flash, Mirza threw off his grasp, and turned and faced him.

As Goujon recognized her, he started back. He had already had one experience with her sharp nails, and had no desire to repeat it.

"The devil," he muttered, "or the Bohemian! It's the same thing."

"Do not stay me, sergeant, let me pass," said Mirza,

trying to draw him away, so that Gabrielle could escape to the house.

But Goujon had recovered himself. After all, she was only a woman, and a very pretty one at that.

"Pass! Nay, my dear, you are my prisoner," he said, and, with a clumsy attempt at gallantry, made a movement to pass his arm about her waist.

But in a second he recoiled in terror, with a cry of:

"Ah! you serpent!"

For Mirza had eluded his grasp and stood before him with a small dagger glittering in her uplifted hand.

"Beware the serpent's sting!" she threatened, half laughing at the sergeant's dismay.

"Holà! Holà! within there!" roared Goujon with all the strength of his lungs, his knees shaking with fear. "Within there! Somebody! Help me to arrest this sorceress! this witch!"

It was now the gypsy's turn to be frightened. The coward's cries would arouse the house. And the chevalier might arrive at any moment.

"Silence! in mercy's sake, silence!" she entreated. "And go! Go at once!"

But Goujon's sharp eyes discovered her terror, and he regained something of his swaggering courage as her alarm increased.

"Not till I have you safe under lock and key, as I have already your defender, the Huguenot chevalier!"

Mirza started.

"The chevalier! It is false!" she cried.

"By the corns of Saint Ursula, you'll find it true. He's only a stone's throw from here, safe in the Chatelet prison, and will be most assuredly shot at daybreak."

A sharp cry broke upon the still air, and Mirza caught

a glimpse of Gabrielle, as she staggered half-fainting from behind the buttress. But, in an instant, a man, with a swift, leopard-like bound, dashed forward and caught her. It was Pharos, and he made a quick gesture of assurance to Mirza, as he half led, half carried Mademoiselle de Vrissac back into the shadow.

All this happened so quickly that Goujon, though startled by the cry, had scarcely time to turn.

He caught only a glimpse of something white, when Mirza grasped him with both hands and whirled him round like a top.

"You miserable, cowardly, bragging, good-for-nothing ruffian!" she exclaimed, breathlessly, as she twisted and twirled him by the collar. "If one hair of the chevalier's head is injured, there shall be as many holes in your wine-cask of a body as there are knives in the girdles of the men and women, especially the women, of my tribe."

"You're cho—cho—choking me!" gasped Goujon.

"Which would be cheating an honest rope-maker," retorted Mirza, scornfully, as she gave him a final twirl and flung him from her with all her strength.

The sergeant fell heavily to the ground, and at once emitted a series of ear-splitting shrieks.

The house was now alarmed. Lights flitted from window to window. In another moment, the doors were flung open, and the duchess appeared, surrounded by half a dozen retainers.

Mirza had fled, but the light of the blazing flambeaux fell upon the pitiful figure of the sergeant, who had scrambled to his feet, and, with many a resounding oath, was brushing the dust from his clothes.

The duchess advanced proudly and fearlessly, followed by her servants.

"Who called for help just now?" she demanded. "Was it you, fellow?"

"If your grace will pardon my insignificance, it was I," replied Goujon, bowing with exaggerated humility.

"And wherefore?"

The sight of the burly serving-men had restored the sergeant to all his customary bravado.

He puffed out his breast and tapped his sword-hilt significantly:

"Six as truculent ruffians, may it please your grace as—well, no matter, I am rid of them."

The duchess' lip curled with intense scorn, as she said, haughtily:

"I think I know your face. You are the man they call Sergeant Goujon—one who is noted for having a killing tongue, but a quiet sword. You were one of those who fed upon the too easy bounty of my son, my unfortunate son."

Even Goujon's overweening vanity was not proof against the cutting severity of these words. But he still managed to keep a bold front, and replied, half brazenly, half sulkily:

"And therefore I have avenged him."

"You!"

"With this hand. His assassin is now in the prison of the Chatelet."

The duchess uttered a wild cry, a sort of savage *Io triumphe!* Instantaneously, her whole manner changed. Her cold hauteur was gone, and in its place was a frantic eagerness.

"Raoul de Puycadère a prisoner! Is it possible?"

"It was to bring your grace this news that I came here."

"You are sure?"

"Sure."

With blazing eyes, the duchess struck her hands together in fierce exultation.

"More welcome news you could not bring a bereaved mother! In the Chatelet, you say?"

"In the Chatelet. My errand done, I return now to mount guard over him myself."

The duchess clutched his arm in a grasp that made him wince.

"As you value my favor," she almost hissed in her excitement, her heart bounding with ferocious joy at the thought of vengeance—"as you value my favor, guard him closely. You shall be rewarded, well rewarded, never fear. Go! go!"

His object accomplished, Goujon hurried away, his big sword clanking at his side.

The duchess turned to the servants.

"Prepare my litter," she commanded, with a rapid and imperious gesture. "Bring your flambeaux and swords with you! I'll to the Louvre at once!"

She turned, and was about to enter the house, but before she could make a step, a white-robed figure darted out from the shadows, and throwing itself on its knees before her, seized her gown.

"Aunt, aunt, you will not do this thing! hear me, I implore you! Have pity!"

"Pity!" retorted the duchess. "And you speak to me of pity! Raoul de Puycadère is doomed! In defiance of my warning, he has remained to outface justice, and he shall pay the penalty."

"Madame! Madame!"

"The assassin of my son is in the Chatelet! I *want* the assassin of my son!"

"Pity! pity!"

"My son does not want your pity! He calls to me, he cries aloud: 'Mother, avenge me!'"

"No! no!"

"Yes, I hear him!"

"Listen! listen! he does not cry that! No, he does not say to you, 'Blood for blood!' He is in that place where only pardon is recognized for wrong-doing, and where vengeance disappears. He is an angel, and he says to you: 'Mother, honor me as an angel, by charity.'"

"Away! You plead for your lover! Heaven grant that my son's murderer dies! You shall not filch from me his death!"

"May Heaven refuse to hear you!"

"May Heaven hear me, and the king also!"

And the duchess stooped and, seizing the half-fainting girl by the shoulders, flung her from her.

"'Tis a holy vengeance! 'Tis a mother's vengeance! The king dare not pardon! It is my son, *mine*, that this man has slain, and if there be justice in the king, I will exact the price of blood! To the Louvre! To the Louvre!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

BY GRACE OF GOD, KING OF FRANCE.

"Show yourself a man, my son. A king should have no fears."

And Catharine de Medicis, the wily Florentine who had been the cause of so much woe to France by the introduction of the infamous methods of her infamous family, laid her hand upon the shoulder of her son, Charles IX., that hand which, beneath its velvet touch, possessed muscles of steel.

"Fear, mother," said the king, shivering beneath the contact. "It is not that, but I am weary of the sight of blood."

"From the blood of the heretics only can your throne be cemented."

"There is no more necessity of that," and the king rose and commenced nervously to pace the floor. "Coligny is dead, and my brother-in-law is a good Catholic."

"Idiot!" sneered the queen-mother. "Do you believe in that? How long will his recantation last? Just so long as it suits his convenience. Would he were with the other heretics who went to torment on the day of blessed Saint Bartholomew."

"Hush! hush!" said the king, turning pale, "no more of that!"

"The most glorious day of your reign."

"The most infamous. I'll have no more of it. Am I king, or am I not?"

The lips of Catherine de Medicis curved in a peculiar smile.

"Oh, yes, you are king," she said, slowly.

"But you would I were not," ejaculated Charles, impetuously. "Oh! I know that my brother is your favorite son, and you would gladly see him reign in my place. Well, it is easy to accomplish that. The Italian daggers are still sharp. The Italian poisons are still known to you."

The most accomplished actress of her day uttered a deep sigh, her face took on the mask of injured innocence, and even a tear twinkled in the corner of her eye.

A wave of remorse swept over her affectionate if weak son.

He threw himself at her feet.

"Forgive me, my mother, forgive me."

Queen Catherine raised him and pressed him to her heart.

"Will you never learn to trust me?" she murmured. "Will you never realize that it is I who hold the crown firmly upon your head?"

"Yes, yes, I know; forgive me," half sobbed her son.

"And no more weakness?"

"No more. You are my brains, the brains of France. I follow where you direct."

"'Tis well."

And she touched a silver bell, which rested on a table at her elbow.

A page answered her summons.

"The Duchess de Bassompierre awaits. Admit her."

The page bowed and departed.

"The Duchess de Bassompierre!" said the king, start-

ing up with a look of alarm upon his face. "This means——"

"Wait and see!"

The time of waiting was not long. In a very few minutes, the duchess was ushered into the royal presence, pale as a ghost in her mourning robes, but her lips compressed in an expression of inexorable resolve.

She advanced to where the king sat, with the queen-mother behind his chair, and bent her knee before her sovereign.

"Rise, madame, rise," said Charles graciously; "a De Bassompierre's fidelity to the crown is known without empty ceremony."

"I thank your Majesty," said the duchess, raising herself to her full height and looking the king directly in the face, "and am glad to hear you accord the Bassompierres what is only their due. As a faithful subject of my king, I am here to demand justice."

"Justice!"

"Ay, justice! My son has been slain. His murderer is in the Chatelet. I ask his head!"

"In the Chatelet!" repeated the king in great agitation. "When was this? I have heard that he had escaped."

"For a time only. To-day he was arrested."

"The Chevalier de Puycadère."

"The Chevalier de Puycadère. A Huguenot, a heretic, a murderer! Justice, sire, justice!"

"The duchess is right, sire," said Catherine de Medicis, in her clear, cold, unimpassioned voice, pressing her hand lightly on the shoulder of her son. "The man *is* a heretic and a murderer, and should suffer the penalty of his crimes."

The king shook off his mother's touch, and, with his

thin white fingers twisting convulsively, half rose from his seat, and then sank back again.

"My promise," he murmured weakly. "My promise."

"Your promise?" repeated the queen-mother questioningly.

"Yes: I have given my word to the King of Navarre hat this man's life should be spared."

The duchess started violently at these words, but, unseen by the king, Catherine placed her fingers to her lips as a warning for silence.

"Is that all?" she said, lightly.

"All?" ejaculated Charles. "Could it be more? Is not a king's word sacred?"

"Certainly," returned Catherine, with an enigmatical smile. "Unless a king's word is obtained by fraud."

"What mean you, madame?"

"Were you not so trusting, you would know that the King of Navarre is even now plotting for your crown."

"Mort de ma vie!"

"It is true, my son, and all see it save you who are most interested."

"But——"

The words died on his lips, as a portière just opposite to where he was seated was raised, and the graceful form of his sister, Marguerite, appeared.

"Am I intruding?" she asked, as her eyes fell in wonder upon the stern face of the duchess.

"No, no. Come in, Margot," said the king, glad of almost any interruption. "Your advent is timely."

"Most timely," said Catherine de Medicis, bending a penetrating glance upon her daughter. "Marguerite is ever on the side of justice."

"Surely, my mother," replied the Queen of Navarre,

advancing into the room, with a puzzled look upon her lovely face.

Before Catherine could check her, the duchess had hastily stepped forward and extended her hands in supplication.

"Then you will use your influence with the king," she cried, "to grant my petition."

"Your petition?" said Marguerite, understanding the situation of affairs pretty clearly.

"Yes, your Majesty. I am here to ask the punishment of my son's murderer."

"Murderer! It was a fair duel, madame."

"A fair duel!" cried the duchess. "A duel with a boy like that!"

"The King of Navarre is satisfied that the Chevalier de Puycadère was not to blame, or he would not have asked the king's clemency."

"And I? Have I no rights?" began the duchess passionately, but the queen-mother laid a restraining hand upon her arm.

"Be patient! Leave it to me," she said, in a low voice.

Then, turning to the king, who was the picture of uneasiness, she remarked quietly:

"Your Majesty will not refuse this distressed mother the just punishment she exacts."

Before the king could reply, Marguerite de Valois, who, whatever her faults might be, was ever loyal to her friends, and who was thinking now of her favorite maid of honor, interposed:

"My brother has given his royal word to my husband that the life of Monsieur de Puycadère should be spared."

The queen-mother bit her thin lips with rage.

"Your husband," she said, addressing Marguerite

with intense sarcasm. "Yes, in marrying you the Prince of Béarn fulfilled one of those acts of policy demanded for the interest of the kingdom, but, my poor child, the indifference he has manifested for one so young, so lovely, and so fascinating as yourself should scarce, methinks, be the spur to rouse you to become his champion."

Marguerite flushed beneath these words and the keen glance which accompanied them, but not for one instant did she lower her eyes.

"I have promised the *King of Navarre* my alliance," she said proudly and unflinchingly, "and I will be faithful to my promise. My brother, I appeal to you to keep yours."

Charles sat as if stupefied between the imperative look of Catherine and the supplicating regard of Marguerite; while the Duchess de Bassompierre watched the trio with haggard eyes and parted lips, her one thought "Vengeance!"

But the struggle was unequal, and no one knew it better than the wily queen-mother.

"You do well to recognize that your brother is still King of France," she said sternly to her daughter. "Your husband is not king *yet*, and Charles IX. owes no faith to heretics and traitors. No more of this!" And she checked with a commanding gesture the passionate retort that rose to Marguerite's lips.

Then, stooping, she whispered a few hurried words in the king's ear.

A spasm of terror swept across Charles' face.

"No, no, madame," he gasped, and he caught feverishly at his mother's hand. "No, no! Don't desert me! Anything but that! I am indeed lost without you."

A smile of satisfaction played for a moment about Catherine's cruel lips.

"Then you will do your duty?" she asked calmly, knowing that the victory was won.

"Act without me! Do as you please!" was the weak and weary response.

"And you will not interfere?"

"No! no!"

"On your kingly honor?"

"On my kingly honor." And there was just a touch of self-contempt in the words.

"You hear, your grace," said Catharine, addressing the duchess. "Your plea is granted. Your son's murderer dies at daybreak."

A low cry of fierce delight broke from Madame de Bassompierre. She kissed the hands of the king and the queen-mother, and, after a low reverence to the Queen of Navarre, staggered rather than walked from the apartment, as one drunken with joy.

After a commanding glance at her son, and a whispered "Remember!" Catherine followed her.

Sad and sorrowful, Marguerite would have done the same, but a low "Margot!" brought her back to the king's side.

There was no anger, but only pity in the look she fixed upon her brother's face.

Charles caught her hand, and raised his eyes with abject pleading, as if ashamed of his weakness.

"Forgive me! forgive me!" he murmured. And then added, with a short laugh: "By the grace of God, King of France! No! By the grace of our mother, Margot, by the grace of our mother!"

CHAPTER XIX.

BENEATH THE SHADOW OF THE AXE.

The reflections of Raoul de Puycadère were anything but agreeable, as he lay immured in one of the dungeons of the Grand Chatelet.

But a short week ago, he had been possessed of all the dearest wishes of his heart—an honorable post with the master he most wished to serve, and the accepted lover of the sweetest and fairest girl in France.

And now—with no power to fulfil the commands of his king, alienated from the lady of his heart, a prisoner with no possibility of escape, and condemned to die by the axe of the headsman.

The chevalier was no coward, but he was young and life was sweet to him.

He cursed the foolhardy actions which had led him to this point of disaster. Had he but followed the good physician's advice, he would have remained concealed at the Green Dragon until it had been time for him to start on his mission. Then the encounter with the duke would have been avoided, the young man would still be alive, there would be no cloud of blood between himself and Gabrielle, and all would be well.

With a muttered exclamation of mingled disgust at himself and despair at his situation, he rose from the pallet of straw on which he had flung himself, and, pushing a wooden stool beneath the window, mounted it and looked out between the iron bars.

The cell in which he was confined was in one of the towers of the Chatelet. About ten feet below the window was a broad platform, with a parapet some two feet high. Beyond the parapet was a sheer descent of at least a hundred feet to the river which lay shimmering in the moonlight, spanned by its dozen of bridges. A little below Raoul could see the lights of the city and the towers of Notre Dame standing like twin sentinels on guard over the capital of France.

Oh, if he were but yonder, with his trusty sword in his hand! Why had he allowed himself to be taken thus by surprise and without striking one blow in self-defence?

To die upon the battle-field or in fair encounter with a worthy foe would have been a glorious death. But abjectly, miserably, disgracefully, in the very flower of his youth, with all the world before him, beneath the shameful axe of a paid headsman! Oh! it was horrible!

And in impotent rage, Raoul shook the iron bars which stood between him and freedom.

And then before him rose the vision of her to whom his whole heart had gone out, as he had seen her that night at the Louvre with her lovely eyes looking that love into his which her sweet lips so tremblingly confessed.

Ah, death would not be so hard, if he could but once hold her close in his longing arms, but once more hear her voice murmur his name.

And bending his head upon his clasped hands, his frame shook in a tearless, voiceless sob.

But even then, could he have known it, friends were near, faithful friends who had vowed to risk life and limb in his rescue.

Not twenty feet away from him on the platform below

stood one of them. He could have seen her in the moonlight had he chanced to turn his eyes in that direction.

Still, in the yellow-haired buxom country girl, who, with basket on her arm, was coquetting with the sentinel, the chevalier would scarcely have recognized the lithe, brown-skinned Tzigana.

And yet Mirza was there, led by that gratitude which in people of her blood amounts to an absolute passion.

Her dark hair covered by a flaxen wig, her complexion skilfully whitened and her slender figure padded to somewhat robust proportions, she looked to perfection the part she was playing—that of a simple peasant girl who had come to Paris to dispose of the products of her little farm.

And, with nerves strung to the utmost tension, knowing that the stake was the life of the man who had befriended her in her hour of need, she was playing her part as well as she looked it.

Certainly Griffo, the soldier on guard, had no suspicion that he had ever before seen her face, and nothing was further from his thoughts than connecting her with that wild-bird, Mirza.

Leaning carelessly against the parapet, with his arquebuse between his knees, he was by no means averse to whiling away a few minutes of his watch by making love to the innocent-appearing country girl, who, by her own story, had wandered up on the platform in search of her brother.

"Lost your brother!" said Griffo, good-humoredly, in his not unmusical Italian accent. "By hilt and point! as the sergeant says, if a pretty face counts for anything, your brother's far more likely to lose you."

The disguised Tzigana dropped an awkward curtsey, and replied with much rustic simplicity of manner:

"He went into the guard-room to get paid for his eggs and fowls, and told me not to move until he came back."

Griffo laughed.

"And of course immediately his back was turned you climbed the stairs and took a stroll on the battlements. It's against orders, my dear, clean against orders, and, by my faith! perhaps it is my duty to lock you up."

Mirza dropped her basket and clasped her hands in well-feigned affectation of dismay.

"Lock me up?"

"Oh, well, perhaps I can let you go this time," said Griffo, with another laugh. "It's not pleasant to be confined in a cell, as that fellow behind the bars yonder would undoubtedly tell you."

"What bars?"

"Turn your pretty eyes to the tower on our right. Do you see them?"

"Yes." And she lowered her voice, as if half fearful at the bare idea. "Is there a prisoner there?"

"Yes, and one not likely to come out, except to go to his death."

"Who is it?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" chuckled the soldier, pinching her cheek. "So you have your share of your sex's curiosity. Well, there's no harm in satisfying you. It's a heretic, who killed a great nobleman, the Duke de Bassompierre. He dies to-morrow."

"Dies!"

"Peste! It's only a Huguenot. But let's talk no more of him. You're here against orders, and will have to pay the fine."

"What fine?" asked Mirza, who had been gazing up at the window indicated by Griffo and fancied that she saw a white face there reflected in the moonlight.

"A kiss," replied Griffo, with what he flattered himself was a killing smile and one well calculated to win the good graces of the rustic beauty.

But as he laid his arquebuse aside, leaning it against the parapet, and advanced a step to claim the penalty, the seeming country maiden sprang back with a coyness that only served to inflame the soldier's desire.

"Nay; nay," she said, "the fines are too heavy. Besides, I know the regulations. All fines are to be paid to the officer in command, and not to the sentinel. But," with a merry laugh, "I've a flask of wine in my basket, a gift from the sacristan of Saint Bernardine's. Taste it."

As she spoke, she pointed to the basket which lay just under the parapet.

At this, Griffo, whose thirst for good liquor was only second to the redoubtable sergeant's himself, was quite consoled for the loss of the expected kiss, which, however, he promised himself should only be momentary.

"I will," he said, with eager assent. "In default of the lips of a woman, commend me to the mouth of a bottle."

As he stooped to take the flask, quick as lightning Mirza drew a small packet from the bosom of her bodice, and, sending it with unerring aim, flung it through the iron bars of the tower window.

It flew past Raoul, narrowly escaping his head, and fell with a rattle on the stone floor of the cell.

Roused thus suddenly from his sad revery, the chevalier jumped from the stool to see what was the missile that had been hurled thus unceremoniously at him.

At first, he fancied he had been shot at, but in another moment his eye rested upon the packet.

Picking it up, he saw that it was a slip of paper wrapped about a stone. He unrolled it hastily, and, taking it to the smoky lantern which illumined with its faint light his gloomy place of imprisonment, he perceived that there was writing upon the paper.

Holding it close to the lantern, he succeeded in deciphering the following words:

"*Friends are near. A sure plan is laid for your escape. Hold yourself in readiness.*"

In an instant his whole mood changed. What! There was a chance for him still!

He dragged the stool to the table, and eagerly scrutinized the handwriting. No, it was unknown to him. But friends, *friends* were near!

Meanwhile, Griffo had drawn the bottle from the basket and uncorked it. Raising it to his mouth, he took a long draught.

"Nectar! Veritable nectar!" he declared, half closing his eyes in ecstacy and smacking his lips with gusto. "And yet the pestilent heretics say that the holy fathers do not live well. By the way, what is the name of your father, my dear?"

Mirza, who was rejoicing over the success of the first step in the scheme for the liberation of the chevalier, which had been so carefully planned out by herself and the other members of her tribe, answered demurely:

"My father? Oh, his name is Valpin, and he is the miller of Montmartre."

"Valpin," repeated the sentinel, with another pull at the bottle. "A worthy man and a good Catholic, I doubt me not. I drink to his health. And what is your name, my pretty wild-flower?"

"Babette," replied Mirza, drawing a white handkerchief from her belt, and passing it twice across her lips.

As if in answer to a signal, which indeed it was, a figure stole softly from the stairway and crossed the platform with catlike step, close to the parapet, just behind where Mirza and the sentinel were standing.

It was an odd-looking figure, a youth with tangled red hair, in ill-fitting peasant's dress of dark blouse and full, baggy breeches.

His progress was so noiseless that Griffo, engrossed with the bottle and the captivating yellow-haired girl, heard not a sound.

"Babette," said the sentinel, far more neglectful of his duty than he imagined. "Babette! 'Tis a beautiful name. Your health, Babette!" he continued unsteadily, too unsteadily considering the amount of wine he had drunk (if indeed the flask did not contain some drug much more potent than the mere juice of the grape). "Your health, Babette! And your brother? What do you call him?"

"Pierre," replied the girl, who, with her heart in her mouth, was watching out of the corner of her eye the fiery-headed intruder as he crawled with velvet step closer and closer to the tower with its barred window.

"I drink to Pierre! I drink to all your family," declared Griffo, gallantly, suiting the action to the word.

The man in the peasant's dress had reached the tower, and as the sentinel raised the bottle to his lips, he laid his hand on the rough stone-work, and with the agility of a cat, clinging to the projections, he clambered up the ten feet of wall between him and the window, and finally clung to the iron bars, resembling in the moonlight some enormous bat with folded wings.

"Your brother's a long time coming, my pretty Ba-

bette," muttered Griffo, with a maudlin look of what was meant to be tenderness (surely it was wonderful how quickly the wine had taken effect). "But the longer the better. You won't drink, my dear. That's not sociable."

"No, but I'll do something better than that," replied the pretended Babette, with an arch glance, which convinced the soldier that he had made a conquest.

"What can be better?" he asked, with a leer. "A kiss?"

"No, no, that *may* come afterward," she laughed, warding him off with a gesture which was far more alluring than repellant. "But I'll sing, if you'll join in the chorus."

"A song in praise of love?"

"No, in praise of the next best thing—of wine."

"By the mass! you're right, and you're a damsel of wit as well as of beauty. Pipe up, and I'll join in."

Mirza took him by the arm and by imperceptible steps led him farther away from the tower, as she broke into a rollicking drinking-song:

> "Then fill, fill, oh fill!
> Let the can, let the can go round."

Who can blame her if her voice was a little unsteady? The critical moment had come, and there was so much at stake. However, Griffo noticed nothing. He was too intoxicated with the wine of the good fathers and the brightness of the girl's eyes.

Raoul was still studying the mysterious writing, when he was startled from its contemplation by a low-murmured:

"Hist! hist! Monsieur!"

Starting to his feet and turning to the window whence

the sound proceeded, he saw to his amazement a face pressed close against the bars.

"Not a word above your breath!" came the warning in the lowest of tones. "The sentinel is only two paces from here."

"Who are you?" breathed the chevalier, scarce daring to believe his eyes.

"Pharos, the gypsy."

"Pharos!"

"Yes. And Mirza is below. Have courage, Monsieur le Chevalier, and you are free!"

Free! Raoul's heart bounded in his breast. The letter then was from Mirza, and action had followed close upon it.

Without more words the Bohemian drew a file from his pocket, and, the noise concealed by Mirza's singing, proceeded, with skilful celerity, to cut through the iron bars.

Raoul watched him in breathless silence.

> "Then fill, fill, oh fill!
> Let the can, let the can go round."

Mirza's clear voice rang out on the still night air, accompanied by an occasional gruff note from the enamoured sentinel.

Raoul wondered idly if he would ever forget that melody.

At last the task was accomplished. The bars, severed at top and bottom, were removed and thrown noiselessly upon the prisoner's pallet.

In another moment, the Bohemian sprang lightly through the opening into the cell.

Mirza's voice for an instant broke, and then pealed forth again triumphantly. The trite drinking-song sounded like a hymn of victory.

"Haste, monsieur, haste!" exclaimed Pharos, speaking with rapid entreaty. "Through that window lies your only chance. Mirza will distract the sentinel's attention as you descend upon the platform. From the platform, you can gain by a ladder the roof of the other tower which overhangs the river. Attach this rope," and he quickly unwound a long coil from about his waist—"attach this rope to the iron flagstaff, and the descent is easy. You have no weapon—here is my poniard, one that has seen service. Do not pause to question. Every moment of delay breeds a fresh danger."

"But you!" said Raoul, hesitating in spite of the other's importunity. "I cannot leave you here."

"Bah! You need not fear for me, monsieur," replied the gypsy, with a short laugh of careless confidence. "The stone walls are not yet built that can keep Pharos long a prisoner. Think only of yourself. On the opposite side of the river, just against the further tower of Notre Dame, you will see a light, the light of a torch. Make for it. There you will find Ismael and others of my tribe, who will bring you to a place of safety. Why do you still hesitate? Would you not live?"

"Yes, yes," rejoined Raoul with a sudden feverish haste. "Yes, my brave Pharos, I would live!"

He seized the rope from the gypsy's hands and wound it hurriedly about him, thinking as he did so:

"Ay, I would live, if only to say farewell to *her*."

"Up with you, then!" cried Pharos, in evident satisfaction. "You have already delayed too long, but it is a chance and the only one."

Yes, he had delayed too long; for just as the gypsy seized the chevalier's arm to assist him to mount to the

window, the sound of heavy footsteps was heard just without the door of the cell, and a coarse voice trolled forth:

"With a clink and a clank,
With a clink and a clank,
Here's more strength to the Catholic flail!"

The chevalier and Pharos recoiled, and contemplated each other in blank consternation.

In an instant, however, the gypsy had recovered his self-composure.

"It's that bragging rascal, Goujon," he said, in a hoarse whisper. "Quick, monsieur, place yourself there."

And he pushed Raoul behind the door, so that he would be hidden by it when it should be opened.

The key was already grating in the lock.

For Pharos to seize the blanket, wrap himself in it, and throw himself upon the pallet as if asleep, was the work of but a moment.

But he was none too soon.

Scarcely was he in position than the heavy door swung inward, and Sergeant Goujon swaggered across the threshold.

He cast his little red eyes about the cell, until they rested upon the figure reclining on the bed.

"By the beard of Saint Bridget!" he grunted, half aloud. "He sleeps! Sleeps as if there were no to-morrow and no Annibal Goujon."

Then, crossing the dimly lighted room, he approached the wretched pallet, and laid his hand roughly upon the shoulder of the supposed Huguenot.

"Holà! my gentleman, arouse thee!" he bellowed. "I bring you news! His Majesty is graciously pleased to shorten your suspense by some hours, and you are

to be executed to-morrow at daybreak. To-morrow! Arouse yourself! Arouse!" with another vigorous shake. "Awake, I say! It is I, Annibal Goujon, the terror of——"

But just here a strange transformation took place.

The gypsy, flinging off the blanket, started up into a sitting posture, and confronted the terrible sergeant with a cocked pistol, held not two inches from his fiery nose.

With a howl of fear, Goujon fell heavily to his knees, and held up his hands in an attitude of supplication.

At the same instant Raoul sprang forward, and using the bent back of the trembling coward as a step, leaped on to the window-sill, and from there dropped lightly to the floor of the platform.

With a thrill of excitement, Mirza saw the action.

"Look! look!" she cried to Griffo. "What is that light on the opposite bank!"

The soldier turned, and at the same instant the Tzigana snatched up the half-empty flask, and poured the remainder of the contents over the lock of the arquebuse, which rested against the parapet.

Meanwhile the chevalier had stolen like a ghost across the platform and was mounting the iron ladder which led to the roof of the other tower.

"I see no light," said Griffo, shading his eyes with his hand.

"You are not looking in the right direction," exclaimed Mirza, seizing his arm and twisting him about. "Over there! near the Pont des Arts."

The fugitive had reached the top of the tower. To unwind the rope from his waist and attach it to the flagstaff was the work of but a moment. Then grasping the rope, he commenced the descent, hand over

hand, warding off with his feet the rough projections of the stonework.

"Peste! There is no light!" said Griffo, wheeling suddenly, before Mirza could divine his attention.

The first thing his eyes fell upon was the swaying figure of the chevalier, now nearly on a level with the parapet and distinctly visible in the moonlight.

"The Huguenot! The Huguenot!" he yelled, and, snatching up his arquebuse, he levelled it at the escaping prisoner.

But, thanks to Mirza's foresight, the piece flashed in the pan.

Dashing down the worthless weapon with a furious imprecation, Griffo pushed the gypsy girl roughly aside, and rushed toward the rope which connected with the alarm bell.

Clang! clang! clang! crashed out the brazen notes.

Splash! Raoul had dropped into the river. And before the soldiers, who came flying out of the guard-room, could ascertain what was the matter, he had struck out lustily for the opposite shore.

CHAPTER XX.

BY ROYAL COMMAND.

Raoul realized that it was to be a swim for life, and, although impeded by his clothes, he exerted all the strength of his muscular arms.

The garrison was aroused—he knew that by the alarm bell—but the river was not wide at this part, and could he but reach the other side, it would go hard with him if he did not manage to elude his pursuers, before they would have time to cross by one of the bridges.

Zip! a bullet whizzed passed him and struck the water just beyond, dashing showers of spray into his eyes.

Instantly he dived beneath the surface and came up breathless some ten feet beyond.

Half a dozen strokes, and he dragged himself, exhausted, out of the water on to the quay.

So far, so good! Giving himself a hasty shake, he started hurriedly down the street.

All was quiet, and no one was in sight.

What had Pharos said? Just opposite the towers of Notre Dame!

This must be the place. But where was the promised aid?

There was no time to lose. He would surely be followed, and in five minutes at the most the soldiers would come speeding across the Pont des Arts.

He glanced across the river. Yes, in less time than that! Torches were already flashing hurriedly along the water-side.

But just at that moment a man darted out from an alley-way and seized his arm.

"Have no fear," he said, as the chevalier started back in alarm. "It is I, monsieur, Ismael the Bohemian. Quick! quick! There is no time to lose!"

And he flung a dilapidated cloak over the Gascon's wet garments, and thrust a ragged hat into his hand, bidding him to pull it down well over his face.

"Now, follow me!"

The Bohemian plunged back into the dark passage-way from which he had emerged, and Raoul hurried after him, keeping close upon his footsteps.

Twisting and turning they went on at a rapid pace, the gypsy evidently well acquainted with the way, for he never hesitated for an instant.

"Courage, monsieur," he said at last, looking back over his shoulder. "We are almost there."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth, when a loud "Halt! Who goes there?" brought them both to a standstill.

Raoul clapped his hands to the dagger Pharos had given him and drew it from his belt.

"For the love of heaven, monsieur, put back that weapon!" said the gypsy, in a quick whisper. "It is the watch!"

"But——"

"Hush! Leave it to me! I answer for your safety on my life!"

The chevalier knew that his guide was faithful, and yet it was with great reluctance that he returned the dagger to his belt.

The watch was now close upon them, a captain and four men.

"What are you doing abroad at this time of night?" demanded the captain.

"We are on special service," replied Ismael, coolly.

"On special service," repeated the captain, scornfully eyeing the two ragged figures before him. "And on whose, pray?"

For answer, the gypsy drew a paper from the breast of his blouse and handed it to his interlocutor.

Taking it to the light of a lantern which was hung across the corner of the street, the captain of the watch unfolded the paper and read what was written thereon.

"Pass the bearer and his companion without delay or question, but not outside of Paris. CAROLUS REX."

It was with a very different manner that the captain now addressed the two men, whom he had been on the point of arresting.

He returned the paper to Ismael with the utmost deference.

"Pass, gentlemen," he said, "and pardon me for detaining you, but in these times it behooves a king's officer to use every precaution."

"You have only done your duty. We have no complaint to make," returned Ismael, calmly. "Good-night, officer."

"Good-night, gentlemen. May the saints speed you!"

And the officer drew aside to allow the gypsy and his companion to pass.

Ismael raised his hat with courtesy and strode forward, followed by Raoul, greatly puzzled at the easy manner in which his guide had solved the difficulty.

For five minutes they moved ahead in silence, and

then the gypsy turned into a garden, surrounded by a crumbling wall.

"Step carefully, monsieur," he said, and the warning was needed, for the pathway was overgrown with weeds and littered with rubbish.

A few minutes' walk brought them to what seemed to be an unfinished house.

The gypsy descended a step or two to a door leading to the basement.

He rapped once and then twice, with a quick staccato movement.

"No one is here. They are late," he said, and drawing a key from his pocket, he unlocked the door and threw it open.

"Enter, monsieur," he said. "This is a sure asylum."

Raoul obeyed and found himself in pitchy darkness. But only for a moment. Ismael produced flint and steel, and soon two candles were lighted, emitting a feeble light.

The chevalier looked around him in bewilderment.

It was a poor place enough—a sort of cellar, roughly furnished with a deal table and half a dozen rudely constructed chairs.

The gypsy went to a cupboard and brought forth bread, cheese, and a bottle of wine.

"Eat," he said. "You must be faint."

De Puycadère was only too glad to comply, but his curiosity was excited as to how the Bohemian had managed to pass the watch, and, as he ate, he interrogated him on the point.

Ismael smiled.

"It was very easy. There was nothing miraculous about it," he said. "Monsieur le Chevalier has friends in high places as well as in low. Before attempting

your rescue, Pharos consulted the landlord of the Green Dragon, who went to Master Pare, the king's physician, and through him a pass was obtained from his Majesty. It might not have been necessary, but it is well to be prepared on all points. The paper I showed the captain of the guard was that pass."

Raoul stretched forth his hand and grasped that of the Bohemian.

"How can I ever thank you?" he said.

"The indebtedness is still on our side," responded Ismael, simply. "The children of Egypt are one, and you saved Mirza."

After Raoul had eaten and drunk sufficient to refresh his jaded condition, he stretched his arms with a long yawn and said:

"My good friend, I have a lengthy journey before me to-morrow, and it would be well if I sought some rest."

But the gypsy made a gesture of negation.

"Not yet, monsieur," he protested. "Monsieur may have a visitor to-night, whom he would be sorry to miss."

"A visitor!" ejaculated the chevalier in surprise.

But, before he could ask any questions, a low tap resounded from the door, followed by two more in rapid succession.

Ismael unbarred the door, to admit Mirza, flushed and breathless, still in the disguise of the peasant.

As she caught sight of the chevalier, she uttered an exclamation of joy.

"Thank heaven, you are safe!"

"Yes, and it is your work," said Raoul, rising from the table and bowing before her with as much reverence as he would have shown the Queen of Navarre herself.

"No. I could have done nothing without Pharos," replied Mirza, modestly, as, with a gesture of impatience, she flung off the flaxen wig.

"And Pharos?"

"Pharos!" with a confident laugh. "Trust Pharos to take care of himself."

"Mirza," said Raoul, approaching nearer and speaking in a low tone. "Did you go to the Hôtel de Bassompierre to-day?"

"Yes."

"And Mademoiselle de Vrissac?"

The Tzigana smiled, looking up at Raoul with eyes full of meaning.

"Oh! I saw her too. She kept the rendezvous. There will be at least one happy heart in Paris when your escape is known."

The chevalier's face absolutely sparkled with renewed hope.

Ah! what a happy time is youth! How little it takes when one is young to turn despair into joy! Youth is well named the spring-time of life. It no more fears the future, than the blade of grass which pushes forth its first feeble shoot in a field devastated by winter doubts Mother Nature.

"What did she say? What did——"

But again the chevalier was interrupted, as the same signal was repeated upon the door.

"Chut! monsieur," whispered Ismael. "These must be the visitors I spoke of."

The door being opened gave entrance to two men wrapped in long, dark mantles and their faces covered with masks.

The taller of the two advanced to Raoul, who was in doubt whether this was a fresh cause for alarm or

not, and removed his vizard, exhibiting the eagle-like features of the King of Navarre.

"Your Majesty! Here!" exclaimed the chevalier in amazement, sinking upon one knee before his sovereign.

"Rise! rise!" commanded Henri, impatiently. "This is no time for folly of that sort. The times are too perilous. Leave ceremony for the court, where it is only valuable to keep fools at a distance."

Raoul, still bewildered, rose to his feet. "Well, young sir," continued the king, eyeing him with a glance which combined both pity and scrutiny, "have the last few days destroyed your spirit, or are you still ready to be my messenger to the Governor of La Rochelle?"

"I am ever ready to do your Majesty service," replied Raoul.

"Then you will start two hours before daybreak. Your friend here," indicating Ismael, who with Mirza had withdrawn to the farthest corner, abashed at the presence of royalty, "will bring your horse to this place. Here is a pass, and hard work had I to wring it from my brother-in-law. Had he known to what purpose it was to have been put, he would never have given it, eh, Master Pare?" and he turned to his companion, who had also unmasked, exhibiting the pale, intellectual countenance of the king's physician. "And now," continued Henri of Navarre, "here are further instructions for the Governor of La Rochelle. The attack will be made shortly, and he is to resist to the death. To the death! Do you understand?"

"I understand, your Majesty," replied Raoul, as he received the two documents. "But oh, sire," and he trembled at his own effrontery, "what shall I say when they ask me if our leader has indeed recanted?"

A dark frown crossed the King of Navarre's face, and for a moment it seemed as if he were about to strike the audacious questioner to his feet.

Then a smile parted his thin lips.

"I like your spirit," he said. "But it is for you to obey commands and leave higher questions to those above you. Is not the crown of France worth a mass?"

The chevalier made no reply.

"I see you blame me," continued the king, with a somewhat sarcastic laugh, and yet not angrily. "What is that to me? And why I answer you I do not know, save that I see in you that rare virtue—sincerity. Do you know your classics? If you do, you must remember what Tacitus says: 'Oh! the happy time when each one can think what he likes and say what he thinks!' That happy time has not yet arrived."

"And yet, sire——" began Raoul, and then paused.

"Go on," said Henri, with a good-natured smile. "I am in a humor to hear you now, and I may not be again."

"Why, then, abandon the religion of which you are the leader, and so dishearten your followers?"

"Abandon, never! I have simply laid it aside. Believe me, it is better to recoil in order to leap the further, than to leap at once, when sure of falling short of your mark. How would it have benefited my followers had I, in stubbornness, sacrificed my life?"

"But surely the King of France would have listened to reason," suggested Raoul, surprised at his own boldness.

"The king, perhaps. But not the queen-mother. She is the head of France at present, and, believe me, one does not argue with success. I have done what I considered for the best, and for the future welfare of

the country I love. Do not be too exacting, mon ami. To expect absolute rectitude here below is a dangerous dream. And do not judge by appearances. What amuses the child is the marionette, what interests the man are the wires by which it is worked. Let time show whether my course has been right or not. And let posterity judge me."

A shade of sadness passed over the face of the man who was destined in the future to be the guiding-star of his beloved France and to do away with many of the abuses under which she was now groaning. But it was only for a moment that Henri's face was overclouded. Then, wrapping his cloak about him again, he laid his hand firmly on the young Gascon's shoulder.

"And now, do your duty. I have placed in your hands a dangerous and important mission. The pass I have given you and filled up with an assumed name was bestowed on me personally, in case my safety should require it. But be wary. Do not be captured again. For should you be recognized, I fear not even that pass would avail you. Farewell and God-speed! Away with your doubts! Trust your sovereign as he trusts you!"

"To the life, sire!" exclaimed Raoul fervently, his whole heart full of affection and devotion, as he raised to his lips the hand so frankly extended to him.

Without more words, the King of Navarre turned to leave the place.

But Master Pare lingered a moment.

"You forgot my advice, my boy," he said in a low voice and half reproachfully. "I did not know of your arrest till recently, shortly before the king, who had been in communication with Simon Beppa, sent for me to accompany him here. Otherwise—but it is useless

to speak of that now. *But* if you are in danger again, send for me if possible without delay. I—and I alone—may be able to save you. I dare say no more now. My science is not omnipotent. Hope *for all things*, and—remember!"

CHAPTER XXI.

RAOUL TO THE RESCUE.

After the departure of the King of Navarre with Master Pare, the chevalier, in spite of himself, could not but feel encouraged.

He fully realized how great a compliment the king had paid him in seeking him out in that squalid place and in bestowing upon him the confidence he had.

The physician's words too were full of cheer for the future. Raoul could not but wonder if the good man were not in possession of some secret which sooner or later would dissipate the clouds that at present lowered over his path.

If he could only see Gabrielle, if it were but for one instant, to hear her say that she forgave him for the injury, unconscious though it were, he had wrought to her and her family. But any further attempt in that direction was not to be thought of for a moment. His duty, and his sole duty, now was to proceed to La Rochelle and fulfil his master's behest.

"Mirza," he called, raising his head, and beckoning to him the gypsy girl, who had remained hidden away in a dark corner with Ismael during the preceding interview—"Mirza, do you know what arrangements have been made for me to obtain my horse in the morning?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Chevalier. Ismael will conduct

you to her. All has been settled with Master Beppa. But, monsieur——" and the girl hesitated.

"Well?"

"You will not run such fearful risks again?"

"Have no fear."

"When, in the gardens of the Hôtel de Bassompierre——"

"Ah!" cried Raoul, leaping to his feet with all his old-time impetuosity—"Ah! you were there!"

"Yes."

"And you saw *her?*"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Heaven bless her! She came to meet me! And I," bitterly, "*I* failed in my appointment!"

"She understood, monsieur."

"She knew of my arrest?"

"Yes. Sergeant Goujon came to inform the duchess."

Raoul ground his teeth with rage.

"Ah! the sergeant! I have a long score to settle with him. And settled some day it shall be!"

"May I be there to see!" exclaimed Mirza, with a gleam in her black eyes which showed that, with all her capacity for gratitude, she possessed her full share of the vindictiveness which is supposed to be a characteristic of her race.

"Mirza," continued the chevalier, taking the girl's hand in his, "no one could have been better friend than you have been to me. Dare I ask one further proof of your goodness?"

"You have only to speak, monsieur. Your wishes are my commands."

"When I am gone from here, seek in some way to see her once again, and tell her—tell her, the twin stars

of our destiny have not yet sunk. Tell her, for yet a little, to hope and trust."

The Tzigana gave the required promise; and, making a pillow of his cloak, the chevalier threw himself down for the rest he so much needed to fit him for the long journey in store for him on the morrow.

While he slept, the gypsies outside, who had been warned by Mirza of what would be expected of them, kept faithful watch.

Long before daylight, Ismael aroused the Gascon, and, with the utmost precaution, led him by a round-about way to the rear of the stables of the Green Dragon.

Here Simon Beppa, the faithful, was in waiting, with the horse saddled and bridled. He also had Raoul's sword, and as the young man buckled it once more about his waist, it seemed to furnish him with a fresh store of courage.

He could have sworn too, as he caressed the horse's head, that the splendid animal knew him again, and this was another good omen.

No time was lost in the preparations for departure, and after a hearty farewell to each of his two friends, Raoul found himself riding slowly (for undue haste might have aroused suspicion) toward the outskirts of the city. He passed the guard at the gate without difficulty, although the officer in charge closely scrutinized both the pass and its presenter.

"Did this bear aught other than the royal signature, we might be obliged to detain you," he said, half apologetically, as he handed back the paper. "We have orders to exercise more than usual caution."

Raoul bowed politely, replaced the document, but made no response in words, as he touched the horse lightly and rode through the gate.

The first danger was passed. As soon as he dared, he spurred on his steed, and was soon clattering away at full speed southward.

All day long he rode, the good horse seeming to know no such thing as fatigue. Truly this mare, in whose veins ran the blood of Arab ancestors, was a striking contrast to the rawboned animal with which Raoul had set forth from Puycadère.

She seemed to know the love her master had conceived for her, and to be resolved to leave nothing undone to merit it.

Raoul stroked her sleek neck and baptized her Speranza in honor of the goddess of Hope, at whose shrine he was then a devout worshipper.

That day and the next were productive of no untoward events, and by nightfall of the second day they had reached the village of Seuil, not twenty miles away from La Rochelle, their final destination.

Here the chevalier determined to remain until the morrow. It would have been impossible to reach the city before the closing of the gates, and besides he was not willing to tax further the splendid animal that had carried him so well.

The inn of the town was clean and neat, and kept by a bright-faced, merry little woman who reminded De Puycadère strongly of his good friend of Saint Germain, Madame Rose Goujon, whose kindheartedness almost atoned for the wretched qualities of her miserable, unworthy husband. After an excellent supper, the king's messenger stretched himself in a corner of the fireplace with a flask of good Rhenish at his elbow.

The room rapidly filled up with the villagers, until it was crowded almost to overflowing. All seemed un-

duly excited, and it was evident that there were topics of more than ordinary interest to discuss.

The whole talk was of the massacre in Paris, and Raoul soon saw that there was a strong determination among these sturdy Huguenots to resist in this part of the country all royal persecution or encroachment on their rights. No second Saint Bartholomew would be possible here. They were warned and ready.

There were two men who had the most to say and to whose opinions the others listened eagerly and with deference; one was a big, burly fellow with a loud voice and apparently a person of wealth and influence, the other was his exact opposite, a little, delicate-looking man, but with features full of kindliness and refinement.

"I tell you, Master Mastino," the first was saying, as Raoul's attention was drawn to their conversation, "this is no Paris, as the king will find. La Rochelle will teach his grace of Guise to sing another song. La Rochelle will have no royal garrison forced upon her."

"Granted," replied the one addressed as Master Mastino, "but I doubt much if the king or the Duke of Guise attempts so high-handed a proceeding."

This statement was greeted by a perfect hubbub of exclamations.

"As much as you know about the matter," replied the burly man, as soon as his voice could be heard above the noise. "It is strongly rumored, and I believe the rumor to be correct, that a garrison is ordered at La Rochelle, and a veritable army is coming to enforce the demand."

"Indeed," said Mastino, in surprise; "nothing was known of this when I left La Rochelle, or rather Vrissac, this morning."

At the word Vrissac, Raoul could not repress a start, but he was destined to receive a still greater surprise at the very next words spoken.

"Vrissac! Ay, and the accursed vicomte is the man appointed as chief of the garrison. Ma foi! He'll find things somewhat changed at the château!"

And the speaker roared with laughter, in which he was joined by almost the entire company.

"It was an outrage!" cried Mastino, indignantly. "The château was not his, and, moreover, it ill behooves us to copy the atrocities of our enemies."

"Bah! You would talk in a different vein had you not been physician to the Vrissac family. But we won't quarrel over that. There'll be plenty of bloodshed before long!"

"I fear so! Ah, would the king had better counsellors!"

"That would be treason in Paris, Master Mastino, but here we can snap our fingers at Lorraine and the Italian woman. Curses upon the murderers of Coligny! Ah! if we had but a leader. Would Harry of Navarre were among us; but," with a sigh, "he, they say, goes now to mass."

"Ay, 'tis a shame! No gallanter leader could we wish for, but he has saved his own neck at the expense of his followers."

Raoul longed to speak out, to declare himself as equerry, to narrate his conversation with the King of Navarre, and to assure these Huguenots that their leader was with them heart and soul; but a moment's reflection convinced him that this would be unwise, not to say dangerous. What the king had said had been said to him in confidence, and it was not for him to betray it.

He finished his bottle of wine and then sought his room.

Bright and early the next morning, mounted on Speranza, he set out for La Rochelle.

In all the villages through which he passed, he noticed that the people were in the streets and that intense excitement prevailed.

Evidently the news he had heard at Seuil the evening before had preceded him.

He dashed by the various groups, however, without stopping to ask questions, and at about nine o'clock found himself within a few miles of his destination.

As he was riding rapidly along, he noticed at one side of the road a magnificent estate, but the lawns and terraces of which were trampled and defaced, and the mansion itself was disfigured and blackened as if by a recent conflagration.

Two peasants, one a very old man and the other a mere boy, were sitting under a tree by the roadside, discussing a frugal meal.

The chevalier drew rein, and, addressing them, inquired as to the cause of the devastation.

"That is the Château de Vrissac," piped up the boy eagerly, "and it was set on fire because it belongs to the wicked vicomte, an enemy of our religion."

"Tush, tush, boy, your tongue flies away with you," interrupted the old man, reprovingly. "'Tis true the vicomte is harsh and unjust, but the fire was started by new-comers in the village, who had been misinformed as to the ownership of the domain. The vicomte is not the proprietor, but his cousin, Mademoiselle Gabrielle, who, though her worship be not ours, is as sweet and lovely a young lady as the sun ever shone on. Heaven bless her!"

The blessing was re-echoed in the chevalier's heart as he bestowed upon the peasant a largess so great as to cause his old eyes to open wide with amazement and gratitude. It was a larger sum than he had ever possessed at any one time in all his simple life.

Without waiting for the thanks which were heaped upon him, Raoul rode off, and was soon before the gates of La Rochelle.

He found no difficulty in gaining admission to the governor, and his interview with that official was most satisfactory.

The governor's face fairly beamed with joy as he read the communication from the King of Navarre, in which the latter warned him of the approach of the royal troops, bade him refuse entrance and hold the city at all costs, and in conclusion gave assurance to all the Huguenot chiefs that he (Henri) was with their cause heart and soul, and only awaited a fitting opportunity to declare the fact publicly.

"This saves La Rochelle!" was the exultant cry of the governor, as he hastened away to inform the various officers of the glorious news.

In spite of Raoul's impatience to set out on his homeward journey, he was compelled to remain the entire day until the return dispatches could be prepared.

As the King of Navarre's messenger, every attention and courtesy were paid to him, and a young officer of about his own age was detailed to show him about the city.

He found the place to be splendidly fortified and fully equipped with men and ammunition. There was no doubt that if the royal troops should attempt a siege, they would stand but little chance of success.

Before he had half finished his tour of inspection, all

the chevalier's warlike instincts were aroused, and he found himself more than once wishing that he might remain to take part in the approaching fray.

But this of course was impossible, as his orders were to return to Paris at the earliest possible moment.

Just before nightfall all was in readiness, and with the precious dispatches sewn within the lining of his doublet, Raoul bade a cordial farewell to the governor and the young officer, leaped upon Speranza's back, and clattered out of the gateway, the portcullis being immediately lowered behind him.

It was a beautiful evening, and the smiling landscape gave no token of the terrible scenes of battle and bloodshed it was destined to witness before twenty-four hours had elapsed.

The chevalier rode leisurely along, as it was not his intention to proceed farther than Seuil that night, and he might have to make a long detour on the morrow in order to avoid the approaching army.

In any event, it would have been dangerous to attempt to pass through the royal troops, but it was doubly so now that he had reason to believe that Hector de Vrissac, his declared enemy, was in command.

It was already dark when he passed the Château de Vrissac, and the huge building loomed up a shapeless mass through the gloom. He felt enraged at the vandalism which had been committed, and more than ever deplored the strife of party which was racking that fair land of France from north to south, from east to west. If Henri of Navarre should ever come to the throne, he would be a king in all that the name implied, and not a mere puppet in the hands of unscrupulous advisers.

There was the tree under which the two peasants had sat. What was it the old man had said? "As sweet

and lovely a young lady as the sun ever shone on." Ay, that she was. And the young Gascon grew very humble at the thought that he had won this pearl of price; for not for one instant would he admit but that she would be his eventually, in spite of the clouds that now hung darkly over their destiny. How he despised himself for the gay, reckless life which had been his before he had met her, and how he would struggle to be worthy of her in the future, should his hopes be realized or not. In spite of the passing fancies which come to every young man of imagination and an ardent temperament, he had never loved before and he would never love again. From his boyhood upward such a vision as that of Gabrielle had haunted at times his waking thoughts and lent its brightness to the world of dreams, but never did imagination conjure up so beautiful a reality.

Absorbed in these thoughts, he rode slowly on until he was about a mile from Vrissac, when suddenly his meditations were rudely interrupted by fierce exclamations and then the clash of steel.

Just ahead of him was a turn in the road, and it was from beyond this turn that the noise came.

The chevalier's first impression was that the royal army was approaching and he had narrowly escaped thrusting his head into the hornets' nest; but this idea was quickly dispelled as a woman's scream rang out shrilly on the night air.

Spurring Speranza forward, he soon came to the turning, and there a strange scene was displayed before his eyes, in the light of blazing torches which had been fixed in the high bank by the roadside.

In the middle of the highway was a travelling carriage, the frightened horses of which were held by a burly fellow, whose features were indistinguishable.

Surrounding the carriage were four other desperadoes armed with pikes.

Upon the ground lay the motionless form of a man in the livery of a footman, and Raoul caught a glimpse of two figures running toward the bushes, evidently the other servants who had fled at the attack upon the coach, leaving its occupants to their fate.

And one of these occupants at least was a woman!

Not for one instant after he realized the condition of affairs did the chevalier hesitate.

Drawing his sword, he rode headlong into the midst of the freebooters, for such they were. The ruffians were taken totally by surprise, and before they could realize what had happened two of them had bit the dust, struck down by Raoul's trusty sword. The man, who had been standing at the horse's head fled in dismay, but the other two held their ground.

In an instant, the Gascon had leaped from his saddle and was bearing down upon them. A sweep of the keen blade and one of them fell writhing to the ground, but meanwhile the other had thrust with his pike only too surely, and Raoul felt a sharp pain in his shoulder where the weapon had pierced it.

Before the pike could be withdrawn, however, with a lightning-like lunge he had passed his sword clean through the body of the wretch who had wielded it.

Grasping the pike, he pulled it out from his shoulder. A rush of blood followed, and, faint and dizzy, he turned toward the carriage. There, framed in the window and distinctly visible in the light of the torches, was the horror-struck face of Gabrielle de Vrissac.

With a low, inarticulate cry, Raoul staggered forward a step, and then consciousness left him, and he fell headlong, almost at the very feet of the woman he loved and for whom he had fought so gallantly.

CHAPTER XXII.

CAUGHT IN THE TOILS.

To explain how Mademoiselle de Vrissac happened to be in the dangerous plight from which she was rescued by Raoul, a brief retrospective glance will be necessary.

We have seen how the duchess went to the Louvre and with what success she met.

It needed only one glance at her aunt's face for Gabrielle, who had passed the time of the duchess' absence in an agony of suspense, to know what was the result of her mission.

The chevalier was doomed.

Although Gabrielle fully realized that all was over between them, that never could she give her hand to one which was stained in the blood of a cousin, who had been as dear to her as any brother, it was like a death-knell to her as well, to know the man she loved, ay and loved still in spite of all, was destined to lose his head upon the scaffold.

Not one word did she say to her aunt. And, indeed, it would have been useless. Sorrow seemed to have wrought an entire change in the duchess' whole nature.

Faithful to her word, she had spared the life of the man who had thrown himself on her protection, and permitted him to pass uninjured from the house into which he had brought desolation and left a shadow which would never be lifted—the shadow of death.

But now all the kind and loving springs of her nature seemed dried up, all the large charity of the woman was asleep, and the *mother* was aroused, with but one thought in heart and brain—vengeance on the man who had deprived her of her son.

But not so with Gabrielle. Her one thought was to save the prisoner, and then bury what remained of her miserable life in some convent.

But how to save him?

The Queen of Navarre was her only hope, and to the Louvre she betook herself as early the next morning as court etiquette would permit.

But Marguerite, loving and sympathetic as she was, could give no relief to that aching heart.

"My child," she exclaimed sorrowfully, "I have done all in my power, but it is useless. The king, my brother, is inexorable."

"But he will listen to you! He loves you!" cried Gabrielle, wildly.

"He loves me, yes. But there is one of whom his fear is greater than his love for me."

"I know! And to her I will go!"

"Nay, nay, my child," said Marguerite, laying a restraining hand upon the young girl's shoulder; "it would be but to dash your head against a wall of granite."

But Gabrielle, beside herself with grief and horror, flung off almost roughly the queen's hand.

"I care not!" she exclaimed, passionately. "Go to her I must and will! I care not were it to meet my death!"

"Ventre-saint-gris! who speaks of death!" cried a clear, deep voice.

Both women started as the King of Navarre, who had

entered the room unperceived, advanced toward them.

"Ah! Mademoiselle de Vrissac, is it you?" he continued. "And with that Niobe-like face! You have not heard the news then?"

"News! What news?" exclaimed the queen and Gabrielle in a breath.

"The Chevalier de Puycadère will not be executed at present."

"The king has relented?" asked Marguerite, eagerly.

"Not he! But the bird has flown! The chevalier has escaped!"

"Escaped?"

"Ay, and is in safety. I warrant me, the bloodhounds will not catch him this time."

Gabrielle, released from the terrible tension, swayed and would have fallen, had not the queen caught her in her arms.

There, a flood of tears came to relieve the overwrought brain.

Holding the girl close to her heart, Marguerite petted, comforted, and wept with her.

The king, who, brave as he was, shrank from the sight of woman's tears, stole quietly away.

After Gabrielle was somewhat calmer, Marguerite insisted upon sending her back to the Hôtel de Bassompierre in her own litter.

"Courage, sweetheart! Who knows what the future has in store for you."

But Gabrielle only shook her head sadly.

Arrived home, Mademoiselle de Vrissac was told that the duchess wished to see her without delay. Going at once to her aunt's apartment, she found there not only the duchess herself, but the Vicomte Hector as well.

The news of the chevalier's escape from the Grand Chatelet was already known to them.

But the duchess' strength was at end Terrible as the blow was to her, she lacked the energy to pursue her vengeance further and to arrange plans for the recapture of the fugitive.

She lay back in her arm-chair, pale and motionless, her heavy eyelids drooping, and her whole attitude one of hopeless despair.

She did not even look up as Gabrielle entered the room.

But the vicomte turned to her with a gloomy frown on his dark countenance.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "it is scarcely meet for a demoiselle of your position to be alone in the streets."

"I have been to the Louvre," replied Gabrielle, quietly. "And I was not alone. Dame Brigitte went with me, and I returned in the royal litter."

"Then you doubtless know of the escape of Paul's murderer?"

At these words, the duchess shivered.

"Yes," replied Mademoiselle de Vrissac, simply.

"And you doubtless regret your short-lived infatuation?" demanded the vicomte, with a half-veiled sneer.

Gabrielle raised her eyes, and looked her cousin full in the face.

"If you mean—Is all at end between the Chevalier de Puycadère and myself?" she said, slowly and distinctly, "yes, a thousand times, yes. I hope never to see him again."

A gleam of joy transfigured the vicomte's countenance. He took a step forward and caught Gabrielle's hand in his.

"Thank heaven for that!" he exclaimed, fervently.

"Then Gabrielle, dear Gabrielle, the dream of my life will be realized."

Mademoiselle de Vrissac, with no haste, gently released her hand.

"The dream of your life?"

"To call you my wife. You know that I love you."

"I shall never marry," replied Gabrielle, gently but firmly.

"Bah!" laughed the Vicomte. "I'll teach you to think better of that."

"I intend without delay to enter the convent of the Madonna."

De Vrissac started, and the laugh died away on his lips.

"You are mad!"

"That is my fixed resolve."

"Madame la Duchesse and myself will have something to say on that matter. Let me remind you that you are not your own mistress."

"I shall be in six months."

"And meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile, I remain with my aunt if she will allow it."

"And at the same time a target for all the scandalous tongues in Paris."

"Scandal, monsieur!" ejaculated Gabrielle, proudly. "Scandal has yet to touch my name."

"Perchance! But it will not be long delayed. Your —what shall I call it?—love affair is well known. If this chevalier escapes the axe, what guarantee have we that you are not meeting him in secret?"

"My word, monsieur."

"Your intentions are doubtless beyond suspicion.

But it is well to avoid temptation. You will be safer at Vrissac than here."

"At Vrissac?"

"Yes. With Dame Brigitte as a companion, you will be as secluded as in the convent you long for, and will doubtless shortly forget your foolish infatuation."

Gabrielle turned to the duchess.

"Aunt," she said, piteously, "is this your wish also?"

The duchess moved uneasily, as if annoyed at being disturbed.

"For the present, yes," she answered listlessly. "I—I would be alone."

The tears came to Gabrielle's eyes, but she bravely choked them back.

"I am ready, then," she answered, calmly. "When is it your will that I should go?"

"As soon as possible. To-morrow morning."

"Very well."

"You are not angry with me, Gabrielle?"

And there was such a note of pleading in his voice that Gabrielle, in spite of herself, was touched.

"No, Hector, I am not angry," she replied, gently.

"I would gladly accompany you to Vrissac, you know that," proceeded the vicomte, his face clearing at her answer. "But my regiment is ordered to La Rochelle, and I must needs accompany it. We start this afternoon."

The duchess raised her head, and for the first time manifested any interest in the conversation.

"You are going to La Rochelle. Is there trouble there?"

"It will soon be quelled after we arrive," answered De Vrissac confidently. "'Tis only a vain threat of

the accursed heretics. A few swords flashing in the sunlight, and they will capitulate."

"But will Gabrielle be safe?" asked Madame de Bassompierre, with just a slight touch of anxiety in her weary voice.

"Surely, my dear madame. Vrissac is fully three miles from La Rochelle. Even should there be any fighting, she would know nothing of it. Why, the heretics themselves would not dare to touch the château. Besides I shall be not far distant and fully able to protect her."

Madame de Bassompierre hesitated a moment. She had never liked the vicomte, and she asked herself if indeed it were well that her niece should quit the protection of her roof.

But, after all, what did it matter? Her son was dead. Naught else was of interest. Doubtless Gabrielle was as well off at Vrissac as anywhere.

"Very well," she said, sinking back into her former indifferent attitude. "You are her guardian as well as I."

A pang shot through Gabrielle's breast. Had she lost her aunt, too, as well as her lover?

"I will see that a coach and the proper servants are ready to-morrow morning," said De Vrissac. "Of course you will take Dame Brigitte with you."

Gabrielle nodded. She felt like an automaton with no will of her own.

And, after all, it mattered but little. At Vrissac, at all events, there would be peace. It was her first grief, and she had yet to learn the truth of the adage: *Cœlum non animum mutant.*

It was not without design that the vicomte suggested Dame Brigitte accompanying his cousin to Vrissac.

The good woman had been his nurse as well as that of Gabrielle, and she was quite as devoted to the one as to the other. It was the dearest wish of her life to see her two foster-children united. To her, there was no family like the Vrissacs, and she would have laid down her life for either one of the two remaining representatives.

The vicomte was quite well aware of all this, and he counted on Dame Brigitte's assistance to induce Gabrielle to smile more kindly on his suit.

As much as he was capable of being in love with any one, he was in love with his cousin, but he was by no means blind to the substantial advantages such an alliance would bring him; for, besides her large wealth, Gabrielle was in high favor at court and could do much to further his fortunes. And ambition was the god of Hector de Vrissac's existence.

Had Raoul de Puycadère never crossed Gabrielle's path, the vicomte might possibly have accomplished his wish, for he was possessed of a bulldog tenacity, and, in spite of much she saw in him to offend her, Gabrielle was attached to him in a way, merely from the fact that he was her sole kinsman on her father's side, and because they had been intimates all her life.

But, any chance that De Vrissac had ever had was now forever gone. His cousin was not one of those women whose hearts can be caught on the rebound. She had loved once and would never love again. It had been a beautiful dream while it lasted, but she knew now that it was but a vision destined never to be realized.

And it was a heartsick woman that, by the side of Dame Brigitte, rode out of the gates of Paris the next morning, *en route* for Vrissac.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CLOSED DOOR.

It was the hour just before dawn.

Mademoiselle de Vrissac sat alone in what had once served as the grand salon of her ancestral château.

The apartment, which was dimly lighted by a silver candelabra with three branches, was now sadly dismantled, and presented but a wreck of its former elegance.

Everywhere, upon the inlaid floor, over all the magnificent carving of the woodwork, upon the tapestry that covered the walls and the velvet hangings of the windows, were traces of the incendiary flames which had so nearly destroyed the fine old building.

The superb stained glass of a large window which occupied nearly a third of one side of the room was in fragments, and a flight of steps leading from the window to the garden below was partially in ruins, the balustrade entirely torn away.

Little did Mademoiselle de Vrissac herself resemble the brilliant maid of honor of the court of Valois. Her dress was of some gray stuff of the simplest possible make, and her beautiful golden hair was drawn away in rippling waves from her white forehead and confined negligently by a ribbon at the back.

Changed too, though none less lovely, was the face whose pallor told of a long vigil. It was very grave, and there was a certain something in the depths of the

sapphire eyes that had not been there a month before and told that the soul behind had passed the dividing line that separates the girl from the woman.

For three days now had she nursed the wounded and delirious man who had come to her rescue when her coach was attacked by the German freebooters.

Long before he had known who the occupant of the vehicle was, she had recognized him by the light of the torches.

As he fell with that cry of Gabrielle upon his lips, after putting to flight the last of the ruffians, she had thrown open the door of the coach, and, leaping out, taken his head in her lap.

Yes, he was still living, but whom could she look to for aid?

Dame Brigitte was in a dead faint, having lost consciousness at the first attack.

All her retainers were either slain or had fled.

As, in her despair, she chafed the hands of the chevalier and wiped away the moisture from his forehead, the sound of hoofs smote upon her ear.

In another moment a horseman dashed up and, leaping from his saddle, approached with an exclamation of dismay at the signs of the recent strife about him.

But this exclamation was immediately succeeded by another of uncontrollable surprise.

"Mademoiselle de Vrissac! Gabrielle! you!"

The new-comer was a little man, far past his prime, but to Gabrielle, in her distress, he seemed a very angel of light.

She knew him at once, an old friend since childhood and the doctor of the little village of Vrissac. In as few words as possible she related what had occurred.

Master Mastino made a hasty examination of the

chevalier's wound, and pronounced it, though serious, by no means fatal.

"We will take him at once to the château," decided Mademoiselle de Vrissac.

"But the château is partially in ruins."

"In ruins!"

It was now the physician's turn to relate briefly what had happened.

"Nevertheless, there is no other place," said Gabrielle, imperatively.

Scarcely were the words spoken, and before Master Mastino could remonstrate, the coachman and one of the footmen came sheepishly forth from where they had been hiding in the bushes by the roadside, and thoroughly ashamed of their cowardice now that the danger was over.

With their aid, the form of the chevalier was lifted into the coach by the side of the still unconscious Dame Brigitte.

Gabrielle followed, the doctor mounted his horse again, leading Speranza by the bridle, and the little cortège moved slowly on toward Vrissac, reaching the château without further mishap.

Two days had passed since then, days when the air had been full of the echoes of distant cannonading proceeding from the besiegement of La Rochelle.

It was now near the break of the third day, and the preceding night had been much quieter. Evidently the city had capitulated or the besiegers had been repulsed.

Gabrielle vaguely wondered which was the case, without in truth much caring, as she sat with her eyes fixed upon the door of the chamber wherein the wounded man lay.

The physician was there and would shortly come forth to give his report.

"Well, Mastino?"

And Gabrielle de Vrissac rose from her chair, and advanced, with eager questioning in her weary eyes, toward the little man with the kind, benevolent face who had just entered the room, closing the door carefully behind him.

"Well, Mastino?"

"He sleeps, mademoiselle. And the sleep will do for him far more than all my remedies. For a man badly wounded only two days ago, he is recovering in a marvellous manner."

"Then he is out of danger?"

"Without any doubt. He is weak yet from the amount of blood he has lost, but there is no longer either fever or delirium."

Gabrielle raised her eyes to heaven, her lips moving in silent thanksgiving. For an instant, it seemed to her that naught else mattered, if only his life were spared.

"It must be said, too," continued the physician, "that last night was not like the one preceding when the noise of the bombardment continued without cessation until daybreak."

"Has La Rochelle fallen?"

"No. The army of the Catholics has been repulsed with tremendous loss. Everywhere the Huguenots are pursuing them, and no quarter is shown."

Mademoiselle de Vrissac shuddered.

"They remember Saint Bartholomew," dryly added Master Mastino, who was himself of the reformed religion.

At these words a picture flashed before Gabrielle's

mental vision, not that of the massacre, but of another scene on that same Bartholomew's eve, when, in the palace of the Louvre, she had plighted her troth to one whom now a cruel destiny forbade her to think of as a husband.

"Have you heard aught of my cousin, Hector?" she asked hurriedly, passing her hand over her forehead as if to banish the haunting memory. "He was one of the officers in command."

"Nothing, mademoiselle."

In spite of all she had to afflict her, it was with genuine regret that Gabrielle heard this. After all, the vicomte was of her own flesh and blood, and she would have been thankful to know that he was safe.

"You should not remain here, mademoiselle," ventured Mastino, after a pause. "There may be danger."

"Danger! What danger can there be here in this château, devastated by fire, and which every one thinks abandoned?"

"But you are alone here."

"Yes, with the exception of Dame Brigitte, my old nurse, and perhaps the coachman and footman who came with me from Paris; I know not whether they still linger or not. It was Providence that sent you along the highway that terrible night, my good Mastino. Without you, I never could have brought the—the wounded man here."

"Does Dame Brigitte know nothing of his presence?"

"Nothing. She did not recover consciousness, as you know, till some time after our arrival here."

"But why not associate her in your act of charity?"

At this very natural question of the physician, Mademoiselle de Vrissac started with a quick movement of alarm.

"Mastino!" she cried, half commandingly, half imploringly. "Not a word of the man who is there! To no one! No one! You understand!"

Mastino gave her a glance of surprise, but he answered quietly:

"It shall be as you wish, mademoiselle. Besides, our patient should be well enough to leave here when he awakes."

"Heaven be praised for that! This care of concealing him from Brigitte, of continually guarding that door, is wearing me out. This is my third night without sleep."

"I pray you, mademoiselle, to take some repose."

"I shall have time enough for repose," replied Mademoiselle de Vrissac, with a note of bitterness in her voice, "at the convent, where I intend to offer up the rest of my life."

Again the good little man cast upon her a look of wonderment. He could scarcely recognize in this woman who bore such marks of sorrow upon her fair face the light-hearted girl he had known only a few months before. There was evidently some mystery here, an enigma of which he did not hold the key. But so long as Mademoiselle de Vrissac did not choose to confide in him, it was not his province to force her confidence; so he made no comment upon her remark, but simply said:

"At all events you cannot remain much longer here."

"No. I shall return to Paris, as soon as *he* is gone, and I can obtain a proper conveyance. My aunt will scarcely refuse me a few days' refuge beneath her roof."

"If you would deign, Mademoiselle Gabrielle, my little house is always at your disposal," suggested the physician humbly.

With a rapid gesture, Gabrielle stretched out her hand to him.

"I know it, my good friend," she said, with much feeling. "I know it, and I thank you."

The bells from the church tower close by rang forth the hour of six.

"I must leave you, mademoiselle," said Mastino. "There are many wounded in the village. I will return in two hours to take away our patient."

"But if he should awaken before!" exclaimed Gabrielle, in sudden alarm at the thought of what this contingency might entail. No! She had given him up forever. She would not see him again. To listen to his protestations, his entreaties, would be more than she could endure.

"Oh! if he awakens before, open the door for him! Let him go!" was Mastino's careless response.

"I! oh! no! no! He must not see me!" cried Gabrielle, with a shudder she could not repress. And, then, as a new thought struck her, she added hastily: "He does not suspect where he is?"

"He thinks himself in a deserted house."

"Without any idea of which one it is?"

"No."

"Nor of me?"

"Still less—although——"

"Well?"

"Strange to say, your name was constantly on his lips during his delirium. He must have heard me speak to you, and his brain caught at the word."

Gabrielle turned away, to hide the bright flush that dyed for a moment her cheek. Yes, she knew that. When she had watched by his side and hung over him in an agony of suspense, had he not gone over and over,

with constant repetitions of her name, all that had occurred since last they met, revealing to her the details of his escape from the Chatelet and how he happened to be at hand to rescue her from the freebooters? Had she not heard the wild words of entreaty he had poured forth?

But he was no longer in danger. He must go and without seeing her. They were separated forever—forever!

"I shall return home through the churchyard. Expect me in two hours," said Mastino, opening the door of the chamber where the wounded chevalier lay.

"Yes. Do not delay."

The physician left the room, and Mademoiselle de Vrissac crossed with lagging step to the window, and drew back the curtains.

There was a rosy light in the east, and the shadows were fast fleeing from the garden.

The dawn was breaking.

As she watched with aching heart the light growing stronger and stronger, she was suddenly startled by the sight of a figure furtively making its way through the garden below. Who could it be? What new danger threatened?

Almost before she could ask herself these questions, the figure reached the flight of steps, and hurriedly mounted.

In another moment, in the dusk of the early morning, she stood face to face with her cousin, the Vicomte Hector de Vrissac.

She started back, with a cry in which there were mingled relief and alarm.

"Hector!"

"Gabrielle! Thank heaven, you are safe."

"Safe! Yes, but you!"

And indeed his appearance gave cause for some doubt. He was in armor, but it was broken and covered with blood and dirt.

The vicomte hastened to reassure her.

"I am uninjured," he said, "and I have escaped the hounds for the moment. But they were close upon my track. All is lost! Oh! pardon me, Gabrielle, pardon me! Why did I send you here?"

And there was such genuine regret in tone and look that Gabrielle's heart was touched.

"Don't speak of that now, Hector," she said, gently. "Let us think of your safety. That is the most important thing."

"My safety! Yes! But afterward? You cannot remain here."

"No. I shall return to Paris as soon as possible."

"Yes, that is best."

His eyes were devouring her face, and it seemed to him that she had never appeared so beautiful, so desirable. Worn out though he was by fighting and anxiety, a wave of passion swept over him.

"And then—then, Gabrielle," he continued, tremulously, "you will relent. I may claim you for my own."

He approached as if to clasp her in his arms; but Gabrielle recoiled with such evident repulsion that the vicomte's violent temper took fire at once.

"You *shall* be mine!" he ejaculated, fiercely.

"I have already told you, Hector," said Mademoiselle de Vrissac, endeavoring to steady her voice, for, in spite of all her innate courage, she was frightened at his wild words and looks—"I have already told you that I can never love you, save—save as a cousin."

De Vrissac dashed his steel gauntlet down upon the floor with a furious oath.

"And why not? Mort de ma vie! Do you still fancy yourself in love with that ragamuffin, that adventurer, that murderer?"

Gabrielle started and paled to the lips. Not twenty feet away was the very man designated by such opprobrious epithets. If the vicomte should discover him!

"Would to heaven I had him here now!" continued De Vrissac, allowing his anger and hatred full sway. "This time he should not escape! Once face to face with him, and I would strangle him without giving the heretic dog chance even for confession."

Mademoiselle de Vrissac clinched her hands until the nails entered the flesh in an agony of fear and horror.

Suppose Raoul should awake!—should hear the vicomte!—should appear there now before him! But just at this moment De Vrissac's mad outbreak was checked by the entrance of Dame Brigitte, who had been attracted hither by the sound of voices and had hastened to discover what it meant.

As she caught sight of her foster-son, she ran toward him with a cry of delight and threw her arms about him.

De Vrissac submitted to the embrace with a good enough grace, but disengaged himself as quickly as possible. To the questions with which he was overwhelmed, however, he returned but gruff answers.

"Enough of this!" he said at last, cutting short the old woman's volubility. "Those accursed heretics may come in search of me here at any moment. I must away. But first to rid myself of these trappings. I have other garments in the room I occupied when last here."

"Yes, yes," answered Dame Brigitte. "But will it be safe for you to leave here?"

"It is not safe to remain here."

"But are not the streets full of the Huguenot soldiers?"

"Oh, I am not going by the streets."

"How then?"

"Through the cemetery to the priest's house, where I have a horse in waiting. That way!"

And he pointed to the door of the room where the chevalier was hidden.

That way! Gabrielle with difficulty repressed the cry which rose to her pale lips.

"There is an outside staircase leading from that room to the cemetery," continued the vicomte, making a step in the direction indicated.

But, quick as a flash, Gabrielle darted before him, between him and the room, his entrance into which would undoubtedly mean death to the wounded and defenceless man within.

"Stop!" she cried, hoarsely. "Do not open that door!"

The vicomte paused, and looked at her in amazement.

Mademoiselle de Vrissac's heart was beating so heavily that it seemed to her as if its throbs must be distinctly audible to the other two occupants of the room.

"Not open that door! Why not?" asked her cousin, after a moment's silence, which appeared hours to the miserable girl.

Her breath was coming so fast as almost to stifle her, but answer she must.

"Because—because you must not," she faltered, her voice sounding to her far, far away. "Because you might be seen! Because there is nothing there! Because all is in ruins behind that door!"

At this declaration, Dame Brigitte, who had been watching her young mistress attentively, uttered a harsh exclamation of surprise, which however passed unnoticed by either of the others.

The vicomte eyed his cousin with some wonder, but he evidently did not dream of doubting her word. He noticed her agitation, to be sure, and, with a thrill of joy, attributed it to alarm for his safety.

"Oh, very well," he said, turning carelessly away, "then I must go in some other direction. There is no more time to lose. I will at once remove this armor, disguise myself as well as I can, and then—for flight!"

The iron hand which had seemed to be clutching Gabrielle's heart released its hold. A long sigh of relief trembled from her lips. But—it was a terrible thing she was doing: to close a way of escape for her kinsman in his moment of peril.

And yet—Raoul!

"You will go that way?" she asked the vicomte, almost piteously, as she pointed to the half-ruined flight of steps by which he had come.

"Yes."

"But it is dangerous."

"Undoubtedly, but there is no other way."

As he spoke, he turned and abruptly left the room to make the necessary change in his apparel.

Gabrielle still stood in front of the door, the opening of which she had forbidden.

Suddenly she became conscious that Dame Brigitte was regarding her with a strange expression, part amazement, part anger.

For a moment the two eyed each other in silence, as do duellists before the swords are crossed.

The old woman was the first to speak, and when she

did it was in a hard, cold tone that Mademoiselle de Vrissac had never heard from her before.

"Gabrielle," she said, slowly, dropping the ceremonious Mademoiselle—"Gabrielle, why did you tell your cousin that behind that door all was in ruins?"

In spite of herself, Gabrielle shivered. Was all to be discovered?

"I—I said," she began, seeking to gain time.

"You said that there was nothing there," interrupted Brigitte, inexorably. "And it is false! You know it is false!"

"Do you forget to whom you are speaking?" demanded Mademoiselle de Vrissac, with an effort at haughty indignation. "And do I owe you an account of my actions?"

But Dame Brigitte, thoroughly aroused at what she regarded as a deed of unforgivable treachery, was not an atom intimidated.

"Yes," she replied firmly. "You do owe me an account of your actions, *when you lie. Why did you lie?*"

CHAPTER XXIV.

'TWIXT HAMMER AND ANVIL.

"NURSE!"

In the first moment of horror at knowing that her secret was discovered, or was about to be discovered, and face to face with all the terrible consequences such a revelation might involve, Gabrielle could only articulate the one word:

"Nurse!"

But Dame Brigitte was aroused, as perhaps she had never been in her placid life before. She understood clearly that the safest way of escape for her beloved foster-son lay through that room, which Gabrielle had declared was in ruins, and which statement she, Dame Brigitte, knew to be untrue.

So it was with stern face that she advanced a step nearer her young mistress and continued to arraign her in cold, unrelenting tones.

"I repeat that you have lied. There is a chamber there the entrance to which you have forbidden. What is there in that chamber?"

"And what should there be?"

"That is what I ask you."

"And if it does not please me to tell you?" retorted Gabrielle, who had now entirely recovered her self-possession, and was determined to use every weapon in her power to allay the old woman's suspicions, or, failing in that, at least to silence her tongue.

But Dame Brigitte's next move was a startling one.

"Very well," she said, calmly, "if you refuse to tell *me*, you shall tell it to your cousin."

And she moved a step or two toward the door through which the vicomte had disappeared.

"Nurse!" exclaimed Gabrielle, in an imploring tone.

Dame Brigitte paused and turned, but there was no sign of relenting upon her countenance.

"Gabrielle, there is some one there," she said, with a conviction not to be shaken, "some one whom you are hiding."

"Are you losing your senses to speak to me in this way?" replied Mademoiselle de Vrissac, seeking to gain time.

"You are losing yours more than I am mine, if it is the one I suspect."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"I have not been so blind as you think. I remember faintly some one being borne into this house. Mastino has been here. You have taken no rest. And I have questioned the coachman, who has told me all. Whom do I suspect? Whom other than the one who has inspired you with so strange an infatuation?"

"Monsieur de Puycadère?"

"You have named him."

"Can you think——"

Dame Brigitte moved again as if to summon the vicomte.

"If he is not there, open that door then, open it."

"No."

"Then your cousin shall! Monsieur Hector!"

But in an instant Gabrielle had darted before her, and was barring the way.

"Nurse, nurse, what would you do? What would you do? Would you have him kill him?"

"Ah! it *is* Monsieur de Puycadère!" cried Brigitte, in an outburst of anger. "Deny it now if you dare!"

"Well, yes, it is he!" admitted Mademoiselle de Vrissac, thus driven to the wall. "It is he! But, in the name of the saints, be silent!"

"Oh! unhappy girl! You give asylum here to the murderer of your own blood! And you would send another cousin to his death—oh! oh!"

And, overcome by her emotion, the old woman sank helplessly into a chair.

In an instant, Gabrielle was on her knees beside her, her arms about her waist, and the lovely face upturned imploringly to the convulsed countenance of the woman who had never before refused her anything in her life.

"No! no! Nurse! Dear nurse! You do not understand. It was he who came to our rescue, he who saved us when we were attacked. He was wounded. I could not leave him to die alone."

"That is no reason to send your cousin forth to his death."

And Dame Brigitte attempted to release herself from the girl's embrace, but Gabrielle only clung to her the closer.

"No! no! Not to his death! Don't say that! He will escape! I know he will!"

"We must take no chances! Monsieur Hector!"

"Hush! Hush! For the love of heaven, be silent! You did not hear what he said? That he would strangle him," with a shudder, "strangle him without confession! And he is weak, ill, defenceless! It must not be! Ah! nurse, nurse! has there not been enough of bloodshed?"

"Gabrielle!"

It was evident that the old woman was softening. Her eyes were less strained in their expression, and she no longer struggled to free herself.

Mademoiselle de Vrissac was quick to perceive the change and to follow up the advantage.

"Dear, dear Brigitte," she said, laying her head down on the nurse's breast. "You will not be so cruel. No! No! You are good! You are kind! See, I am on my knees before you, begging for what? For the life of the man who came to our rescue at the peril of his own. See, it is I who beg of you, I, your Gabrielle, your little Gabrielle, to whom you have never refused anything."

The tears were now rolling down the old lady's wrinkled cheeks, and she bent forward and strained Gabrielle close to her heart.

"My darling," she murmured, brokenly. "My darling!" And the young girl knew the victory was won.

Then suddenly Dame Brigitte started, and pushed Mademoiselle de Vrissac from her.

"Hush!" she said, hastily drying her eyes. "Not a word! Your cousin!"

Footsteps were heard in the next room, and, just as Gabrielle sprang to her feet, the vicomte entered.

He had cast aside his armor, and was dressed in sombre-colored garments. A hat with broad, flapping brim was on his head, and he was hurriedly fastening the clasp of a long cloak which he had thrown over his shoulders.

"It is time," he said. "Farewell."

"You are going now?" asked Gabrielle, with manifest uneasiness.

"Yes."

"And through the garden?"

"Certainly."

How cruel it seemed to expose him thus! After all, why not the other way? It was dark in that room. Perhaps he might pass through without discovering the figure stretched upon the bed.

"Ah! Hector, if you wished," she stammered, hurriedly, scarce realizing what she was saying: "And yet—if you wished——"

"What?" demanded De Vrissac, in surprise.

"There is another way, perhaps."

And it is not impossible that she might have indicated the door of the chamber which she had declared was in ruins, had not Dame Brigitte risen resolutely from her chair and interrupted her with authority:

"No, my child, there is no other. Come, Monsieur Hector, this is your way, and I will go with you to the garden gate."

Two bright-red spots were burning in Gabrielle's cheeks, and she was trembling like a leaf.

It is not strange that the vicomte misunderstood the cause of her agitation and believed that in the hour of danger her heart had turned toward him.

He took both her hands in his, and, bending forward, touched his lips to her forehead, a caress which Gabrielle did not resist, if indeed she were fully aware of it.

"Farewell," he said. "I shall never forget this moment."

"Wait! wait!" said Gabrielle, feverishly, still retaining his hands. And then fixing her eyes, with a world of meaning in their depths, upon her nurse, added, "It must be! It *must* be!"

"Yes, my child, it must be," replied Dame Brigitte, separating their hands. "There is no other course open. Come, monsieur."

After one long look into his cousin's face, the vicomte followed Brigitte to the window, and commenced descending the flight of steps to the garden.

Gabrielle hastened after them and, leaning against the side of the window, watched their descent.

"May God guard you!" she cried. And then murmured low to herself: "And may He judge whether or no I have done my duty. I—I do not know!"

As she stood there, watching breathlessly the two figures making their way cautiously across the garden, the door of the room, the entrance to which she had forbidden her cousin, slowly opened, and Raoul de Puycadère appeared upon the threshold.

He was very pale and evidently very weak, for he supported himself by the various pieces of furniture as he slowly advanced into the room.

It was now almost daylight, and it was with ever increasing surprise that he contemplated his unfamiliar surroundings.

Gabrielle he did not see, as she was hidden from him by the curtains of the window.

But it chanced that in his progress his foot struck against a low footstool, and Mademoiselle de Vrissac, startled at the noise, emerged from her concealment.

For the first time since they had plighted their troth, the lovers were alone together.

But under what different circumstances! What an abyss now yawned between them!

"Gabrielle!" breathed Raoul, scarce daring to believe his senses. "Gabrielle, or is it her spirit?"

Mademoiselle de Vrissac tried to speak, but the words would not come.

She had hoped to avoid this, but fate was against her

Raoul dashed his hand across his eyes.

"Ah, I remember now," he said. "The travelling carriage. The brigands! The fight! We were four to one! I received a pike thrust through my shoulder. You—you were in the carriage! And then, the woman leaning over me, giving me to drink! For the moment I thought I had opened my eyes in Paradise, for they rested upon the heaven of your face. And it was no dream? You are there, there before me——"

"Hush, no more, I implore you!" murmured Gabrielle, interrupting him with a gesture full of piteous entreaty. "You are out of danger. Ask no more, but leave this house."

"Leave this house!"

"Ah, do not argue. I——"

"Gabrielle!"

He advanced toward her, his eyes aflame with love and longing, but, with a quick motion she avoided him, and fled to the other side of the table, as if to make the senseless piece of wood a barrier between them.

"Do not touch me!" she cried, pantingly. "You must not touch me! There is blood upon your hands, Raoul de Puycadère, and it is the blood of my kindred."

With a low cry of unutterable anguish, the chevalier buried his face in his hand.

Then almost immediately he raised his head, and spoke rapidly, indignantly, and with an increasing and passionate vehemence.

"You wrong me, Gabrielle! Paul de Bassompierre died in fair fight, weapon to weapon, and man to man! The quarrel was none of my seeking, and my cause was just."

"But you killed him! And that has placed between us an impassable river of blood. Leave me! It is

ended! I am dead to this world. Shortly I shall be the bride of heaven."

Raoul listened in horrified incredulity.

"The convent?" he gasped.

She bowed her head in silence.

"You will die to this world because there crossed your path a wretch such as I! No! no! It cannot be! It shall not be! Not the bride of heaven, Gabrielle, but mine! mine!"

She gave him one passionately mournful look.

"Yours! Are you mad? The duchess would curse me! I should curse myself! It would be sacrilege!"

"Sacrilege!"

"Yes, upon the altar steps between us would stand a spectre—the spectre of the man you have killed!"

Every word she spoke was like a bullet in his heart. A bullet? No, a bullet is merciful—a bullet kills. And he, while suffering all the agonies of death, still lived.

But he would not relinquish her, not at least without being heard.

"Gabrielle, you are wrong! Wrong! Listen to me!"

"In mercy!"

But it was useless to attempt to stop him now. He had but one thought—to win her to him. So, in a hoarse whisper, in the low, quick accents of a desperate man, he pleaded his cause:

"I must speak—speak though I die. Since the day we met at Saint-Germain, I loved you, Gabrielle, and when I heard your voice and looked upon your face, I saw the light, yes, the light for the first time—my wild and careless past rolled suddenly away, like the trail of a storm when the sun rises in its glory. A new hope, a new ambition, a new life opened itself before me. I

was another man, changed and purified. For I loved—and I *love!*"

Gabrielle had listened like one in a dream. Raoul had gradually approached, and as he finished he seized her hand, but, with a shiver, she drew it slowly from him.

Half mad with the intensity of his passion, he sank at her feet.

"If it is happiness for a woman to know herself beloved," he continued, his voice sinking almost to a whisper, "to know that in a cold and selfish world there still exists a human heart that beats for her alone, a heart all hers, a heart into which, without fear, she might pour her own, her hopes, her fears, her griefs, her joys——"

"Oh, this is cruel," murmured Gabrielle. She longed to wrest her robe from his grasp, to fly anywhere—anywhere to escape the martyrdom she was undergoing. But, as if bound by a spell, she felt it impossible to move hand or foot.

"I love you, Gabrielle, and such a heart is mine," went on the imploring voice, so bitter-sweet to her ears. "You are my fate, my destiny! Gabrielle, Gabrielle, have pity on me! With your love, I am all; without your love, I am—nothing!"

His voice ceased, and for an instant there reigned an intense silence.

Then Gabrielle drew a long, shuddering breath, and with an effort released her dress from the chevalier's now unresisting hold.

"It cannot be," she sighed, faintly. "There is a *tomb* between us."

Raoul sprang to his feet with a bitter cry.

"A tomb that shall have two tenants, then, for I will not live without you."

Had he but known it, however, he was nearer winning his cause than it seemed; and had he been aught else than her lover, he would have seen that Gabrielle still loved him. For, save to the eyes of the interested parties, whom Cupid delights in blinding, love is of such a peculiar nature that it cannot be hidden where it is, nor feigned where it is not.

But just at that moment came through the open window the sound of shouts and tumult, not far distant.

In an instant Gabrielle took alarm, and she awoke to the fact that danger was near.

The noise must mean that the vicomte was discovered, pursued perhaps. He might return at any moment.

"Quick, you must away at once!" she said to Raoul, grasping him by the arm, and startling him with her vehemence. "Do you hear that clamor? Do you know what it means? My cousin the vicomte was here but now. He is flying for his life, and he has been discovered. The Huguenots were victorious at La Rochelle."

At another time the chevalier would have rejoiced greatly at this intelligence, but now the words conveyed scarcely any meaning to his brain.

"If he returns and finds you here, he will kill you. He has sworn it."

Raoul smiled slightly, but remained immovable, with his arms folded.

"Ah! I understand," proceeded Gabrielle feverishly. "But you are weak, wounded. You are no match for him now. Your horse is in the stable. Descend from the room there, and it is to your right. Do you not hear me? Go!—Raoul!" and her voice rose almost to a shriek. "For your own sake! For *mine!*"

Raoul started, his whole face irradiated with joy.

"For yours! Ah! you love me then!"

And he sprang toward her and encircled her with his arms.

"Do not turn away," he continued with passionate ardor. "But let your eyes look into mine, thus! thus! and tell me that you love me. Speak, Gabrielle! tell me that you love me, and earth has nothing left to offer, heaven nothing more to give!"

Gabrielle in the soft intoxication of the moment had allowed her head to droop upon his breast.

"I love you," she murmured, "but—go!"

He strained her to him, raining kisses upon her eyes, her forehead, her hair.

"I obey," he said finally, releasing her. "But I shall see you soon again."

"Yes, yes! Go! go!" she murmured faintly.

In another moment she was alone.

But not for long. Raoul had scarcely disappeared when the sound of footsteps was heard ascending the flight of steps without, and shortly Dame Brigitte, with flushed face, came hurrying through the window.

"Gabrielle! Gabrielle!" she exclaimed panting and out of breath. "Your cousin was discovered, but he has escaped."

The strain upon heart and brain had been too great.

Gabrielle tottered forward, and fell into the nurse's arms—white, inert, unconscious.

CHAPTER XXV.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

"Will you give me a chamber with a balcony overlooking the square?"

"Impossible, monsieur. I have only two small rooms over the stable."

"Over the stable? You are jesting, madame."

"Nothing could be truer. If monsieur does not wish one of those, he must go elsewhere."

"Elsewhere? Mordiou! have you no better treatment for an old friend, madame?"

And the man who had reined in his horse in front of the hostelry of the Rising Sun quickly threw back the brim of the hat which had shaded his face and rendered the features unrecognizable in the deep shadows of the late afternoon.

"For the love of the Madonna, Monsieur le Chevalier, is it you?"

And Rose Goujon's pretty face sparkled for a moment with delight, only to be overshadowed the next instant with an expression of alarm.

She ran down the steps of the inn and came close to the chevalier's saddle.

"Are you mad to come here, monsieur?" she asked, in a frightened whisper.

"Never saner in my life, my dear Madame Rose. Was I wrong to suppose that an old friend would give me shelter?"

"No, no, it is not that. But do you not know there is a price upon your head? Even now——"

"It would be even more dangerous for me to enter Paris before nightfall. And there is no other place where I can find shelter."

"Dismount, then, monsieur. Dismount at once! Here! Pierre! Jean! Take the gentleman's horse!"

Speranza was led away, and the chevalier followed Madame Goujon into the inn.

With a word or two counselling caution, the little landlady led the way up a flight of stairs to the second story and then down a long corridor, at the very end of which she threw open a door and bade her guest enter.

The room in which the chevalier found himself was large and better furnished than the majority of apartments even in auberges of the better class. Many feminine articles scattered about showed that it had been lately occupied by a woman.

Rose, who had entered also and closed the door with care behind her, said with a blush:

"This is my room, Monsieur le Chevalier. It is the only one I have empty in the house. And, besides, you will be safer here than anywhere else. But I hoped you were far away. What has brought you into danger?"

"My duty, my dear madame."

"But if you are discovered, your life will be the forfeit."

"Mordiou! I must take the risk," he replied, with something of his old-time insouciance. "For those who set too great a store upon it, life is like one of those precious objects which are never used for fear that some harm may come to them. But it is ten days since I have been here. What news in Paris?"

"None. All is quiet, now. But there was a great

hue and cry after your escape, monsieur. And oh!" clasping her hands nervously, "I was so alarmed for you!"

"My good friend! Without your aid in the beginning, I could have accomplished nothing. And your excellent husband, whose particular enmity I seem to have incurred—what of him?"

Madame Rose's lip curled, and she made a gesture of anger and disgust.

"Not a sign have I seen of him until last night, when he came here, a wine-butt as usual and pale with fright, declaring that some demon with fiery red hair had pursued him through the streets."

The chevalier laughed heartily.

"A scalded cat dreads cold water," he said, recognizing some mischievous trick played upon the sergeant by his friend Pharos.

"That was nothing to what he received from me," observed Rose, laughing a little too. "By the beard of St. Bridget! to use his own expression, he passed a very bad quarter of an hour, I can assure you. But," interrupting herself, with her finger upon her lips, "monsieur must be cautious. Goujon is in the house now, and—and——"

"Have no fear. I will run no unnecessary risks. As soon as it is entirely dark, I trust to you to let me know when the road is clear, that I may proceed to Paris."

"Ay, that will I do. I will have eyes and ears on all sides of my head. But monsieur needs refreshment. Remain quietly here, and I will be back as quickly as possible."

And the good little woman bustled away, on hospitable thoughts intent.

After the chevalier had left the presence of Gabrielle (at her command) a bird of rare melody was singing in his heart. She loved him still, and, that being the case, all barriers between them would soon be removed.

He descended the outer staircase and experienced no difficulty in finding the stable, where Speranza neighed joyfully at his approach.

Not a living soul was about, but it was the work of only a few moments to saddle and bridle the mare. He vaulted upon her back, and was soon out of the grounds and galloping along the highway.

That day he proceeded no further than Seuil, where he also passed the ensuing night.

The little village was in a state of uproarious excitement.

Fragmentary detachments of the royal troops had passed through there that day, hotly pursued by the Huguenots.

In the evening there were bonfires and illuminations in celebration of the victory, and all the inhabitants seemed to go mad with enthusiasm.

Tongues were loosened. All loyalty to the king of France was thrown to the winds, and on every side were heard denunciations of "the Italian woman," the Duke of Guise, and the king himself.

Truly, the wish of Charles IX. had not come to pass. "Kill, if you like, but let not a Huguenot be left to reproach me."

The following day the chevalier resumed his journey, but not by the road he had previously taken. This would not be safe, should further troops be sent to enforce obedience from the rebellious citizens of La Rochelle, as was not at all improbable.

Therefore he took a more northern course, through

Anjou and Maine. His wound still troubled him somewhat, so he proceeded by easy stages, the journey occupying some five or six days, and, as we have seen, finally reached Saint Germain, where he decided to avail himself of the kindness of Madame Rose until he could enter Paris under cover of the darkness.

The little landlady was not long in returning with a tempting meal, the odors of which were like incense in the nostrils of the hungry chevalier.

"Mordiou, Madame Rose," he said, with a laugh. "You must be the ruin of all innkeepers if you treat your other guests as you do me. You should have the whole custom of the countryside, though, by my faith, a sight of your face would be meat and drink to most men."

Madame Rose blushed and bridled. She was susceptible enough to compliments, but words of praise from the young Gascon who had so taken her fancy were especially sweet in her ears. Besides she had been of service to him, and while the recipient of a favor almost always is inclined to look upon his benefactor with a certain impatient feeling, born of the sense of obligation, there is generally inspired in us a decided sentiment of tenderness toward those we have benefited.

Moreover, as a maiden, Rose had had her dreams, dreams woefully shattered by the reality of her own married life, and Raoul de Puycadère both in person and character fulfilled all her ideas of a hero of romance.

She turned the subject, however, by saying:

"The gypsies were here yesterday, and I asked Mirza of you. She told me of your escape from the Chatelet and of your departure from Paris."

"Mirza! She and her tribe have been good friends to me, madame."

"And you *must* return to Paris to-night?"

"Beyond any doubt."

"Then Goujon remains here, if I can make him!" And she looked quite capable of carrying out her determination.

After the chevalier had finished his repast, Madame Goujon gathered together the remnants and removed them from the room, first warning him to keep close and on no account to leave his place of concealment until she should summon him.

After Madame Goujon had disappeared, leaving behind, however, a bottle of good wine as a consolation, Raoul gave himself up to his reflections, which were not altogether disagreeable ones. He was by no means blind to the danger of his position, and he was not quite sure how he was to escape from his complications, even with the aid of the friendship of the King of Navarre. But that he would conquer in the end, he was resolved. Gabrielle loved him, loved him in spite of all, and, with this star of hope shining brightly before him, what could he not accomplish? Then his mind turned toward Master Pare, whose brief enigmatical utterances in the basement of the unfinished house the last night he was in Paris seemed to promise so much. And yet what could he do in a case where Henri de Bourbon was powerless? Had he, as the king's physician, and in high favor with his Majesty, and, what was of more moment, with the power behind the throne, with the queen-mother, some secret information which——

At this point in his musing, the chevalier suddenly became aware of voices in heated altercation in the next room, between which and the apartment he was in was a connecting door. Distinctly to his ears came the words:

"It is a dangerous business, monseigneur, and, should it succeed, I claim my reward."

The voice was a familiar one to De Puycadère, and in an instant it flashed across him that the speaker was the Vicomte de Vrissac.

So! Gabrielle was mistaken, after all. Her cousin had not been pursued, or, at all events, not captured, and had managed to make his escape.

Raoul left his chair, and made his way stealthily across the floor to the door, which was apparently of no great thickness, as he could hear almost every syllable that was spoken in the adjoining room, low as the words were uttered. As he reached the place, another person was speaking.

"You need have no fear, Monsieur le Vicomte. The king will recognize your services, and they are inestimable to church and state."

Raoul started. Where had he heard that voice before, and in tones of command?

"All that I need, monseigneur, is your warranty."

"You have that, and you shall have more. I do not disguise from you, Monsieur le Vicomte, that the failure to subdue the rebels at La Rochelle is a blow to our cause, but it is only temporary. The accursed heretics will be subdued, when this, their leader, is silenced. It was a mistake to spare him at Saint Bartholomew, but, with your aid, that mistake will soon be rectified. Coligny is gone, and to-night the Prince of Béarn will also be—removed."

Raoul recognized the voice. It was that of the leader of Saint Bartholomew. He had heard it last at the house of Admiral Coligny on the night of the massacre. The speaker was the Duke of Guise.

The discovery was a startling one to the chevalier,

especially as, judging from the few words he had caught, some plot was on foot against his master, the King of Navarre.

He pressed his ear closer to the panels, and listened intently, all his senses on the alert.

"You are sure, monseigneur," said the vicomte, "that to-night the so-called King of Navarre will be in the chamber of Queen Marguerite?"

"Sure, unless some unfortunate contretemps should occur. The two letters are perfect specimens of their kind, the handwriting has been imitated perfectly. He will be alone, and, if your companions are trusty, your task should be an easy one."

"I will answer for them. Is King Charles cognizant of our plan?"

"No. *But*," and there was a world of meaning in the emphasis the Duke placed upon that little word—"*But* Catherine de Medicis *is*. In proof of which her Majesty requested me to give you this ring. Present it to her *afterward*, and ask any favor you desire."

"Has your grace any further orders?" And there was a ring of gratified triumph in the tone in which the vicomte asked the question.

"None! Stay! In case aught should miscarry, meet me to-night beneath the apartments of the Queen of Navarre at ten of the clock. You know the place?"

"Beyond the moat, near the northern gate?"

"Exactly. Then, if——"

At this point, the chevalier, whose whole attention had been absorbed by the conversation, was startled by the sudden opening of the other door of the room he was in, the one which led into the corridor.

He raised his head quickly, but, as he did so, his foot slipped upon the smooth, polished floor, and he stum-

bled with a resounding noise against the panels of the door at which he had been listening.

For an instant there was silence, and then there was a rush of feet, and the door was roughly shaken on the other side.

"Quick! quick, monsieur! Hide here!" whispered Rose Goujon, for it was she whose entrance had interrupted the chevalier's eavesdropping.

As she spoke, she flung open the door of a wardrobe.

The chevalier obeyed without a word, believing in this case discretion to be the better part of valor.

No sooner was he safely hidden, than Rose ran to the door, which was still being pounded upon, and, unbarring it, flung it open, revealing the angry and alarmed countenances of the Duke de Guise and the Vicomte de Vrissac.

Both gentlemen looked with astonishment and also with evident relief upon the smiling face of the little landlady.

"You!"

"I, gentlemen. Pardon me for startling you, but this floor was polished only this morning and I stumbled."

"How long have you been in this room?" asked the Duke de Guise, whose suspicions were not wholly allayed.

"Not three minutes, monseigneur," replied Rose, truthfully.

"And there is no one else here?" demanded the vicomte, advancing a step or two into the room.

Rose looked at him with admirably simulated indignation.

"Would you insult me, Monsieur le Vicomte? This is my own chamber, and no one would dare to enter here, not even Goujon himself."

The duke glanced at her keenly, nodded his head, and then, turning to his companion, said in Spanish:

"She is speaking the truth. She knows nothing."

"But," he added, in French, as he turned to leave the room, "beware of curiosity, madame. The first woman lost humanity because she wanted to know what it was forbidden her to know."

"I have no curiosity for matters that do not concern me, monseigneur."

The two conspirators returned to the next room, and Rose, with a sigh of relief, closed and barred the door.

Then she hastened to release the chevalier from the wardrobe.

"Now is your time, monsieur," she said. "Your horse is ready in the passage behind the house. But one word of warning before you go. My husband has given me the slip. He went to the stables an hour ago, ordered a horse saddled, and the hostler said he rode away in the direction of Paris. Whether he has any suspicion of your presence here or not, I do not know. But be on your guard. Do not expose yourself."

"I will remember."

"And there is another thing I will remember also," he muttered beneath his breath, as he glanced toward the door which separated him from the duke and the vicomte. "So, Monseigneur de Guise, you would plot against Henri of Navarre, would you? But you have not taken me into your reckoning, and there will be an unbidden guest at your rendezvous to-night!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

BELOW THE QUEEN'S BALCONY.

A COLD drizzling rain, blurring the outlines of trees and buildings, was falling when the chevalier rode slowly into Paris, past the sentinels at the Saint Antoine gate.

He had ridden only a few paces beyond the gateway, when the bell from a neighboring tower tolled the hour of nine. It wanted an hour yet before the time appointed by the conspirators for their rendezvous, but it behooved Raoul to be concealed somewhere near before they could arrive.

He *must* overhear their conversation and know all the details of the plot, in order the better to frustrate it.

He was just about to put the spur to Speranza, when out of the shadow of a house close by darted a dark figure and laid its hand on the horse's bridle.

Raoul was about to strike the intruder over the head with his riding-whip, when a few words spoken in a low voice caused him to change his intention.

"Hist! Is it you, Monsieur le Chevalier!"

And looking down he recognized, in spite of the darkness, the form of Mirza, the gypsy girl, standing close at his side.

"Mirza?"

"Ah! it *is* you," she exclaimed, joyfully, but without raising her voice. "For two days, Pharos and I have kept watch for you as near the gate as we dared."

"What s in the wind?" asked Raoul quickly, scenting danger.

"You must not go to the Green Dragon, monsieur."

"Why not?"

"Beppa is suspected of giving you shelter, and the house is watched. It's that wretch Goujon's doing."

"But——"

"We have arranged it all, monsieur—Pharos and I. You must come with us at once."

"Impossible," said the chevalier, remembering all that he had to do that night.

"Impossible?"

"Yes. I must to the Louvre without delay. It is a matter of life and death."

As he spoke, he remembered that he could not ride his horse to the Louvre and hope to remain concealed.

Leaping from Speranza's back, he addressed Pharos, who still remained at the mare's head:

"My good friend, will you take care of this animal for me till I need her again—and—and if aught should happen to me this night, keep her in remembrance of me."

"Monsieur, you are incurring danger again?" asked Mirza, in a trembling voice.

"In these days, one is always in danger," returned the chevalier, lightly. "And now away, my friend!"

Without a word, Pharos vaulted into the saddle, and in another moment both horse and man had disappeared around a neighboring corner.

The chevalier turned to move away also, but Mirza detained him.

"Only one moment, monsieur. You do not know where to find us."

"Ah, true! Well?"

"Come to the Rue du Moulin, close to the Passage des Rois. Come at any time during the night or day, and some one of us will be on the watch to guide you."

"Thanks. I shall remember."

And again Raoul started to go.

"But, monsieur, I have news for you. News of Mademoiselle de Vrissac."

The chevalier stopped short. Even the important business he had on hand must be deferred at the magic of that name.

"News—news of her!" he cried, eagerly. "Speak! speak, Mirza."

"She has returned to Paris."

"Ah!"

"Yesterday, while on the lookout for you, I saw a travelling carriage pass through the gate yonder, and within was mademoiselle."

Raoul breathed a silent prayer of thanksgiving that she was no longer in that country of the South, racked as it was by civil war.

"Was she alone?" he asked.

"No. Her duenna was with her."

"No one else?"

"No one else, monsieur."

Then the vicomte had not returned with her, and this was balm to the chevalier's jealous heart.

"Listen, Mirza," he said, rapidly. "If all goes well, I shall be with you by midnight, and to-morrow I must see her. Watch for me, find out if possible when she is alone, and how I can approach her. Will you do this?"

"Yes, monsieur, yes. Good-night, and God speed you!"

And the Tzigana flitted away, and was soon lost in the mist.

Raoul wrapped his cloak well about him and strode away toward the Louvre. After a quarter of an hour's rapid walking the palace loomed up before him, a blurred indistinct mass, through the fog.

It had ceased raining, and the moon was making a first feeble attempt to struggle through the clouds.

"Beneath the apartments of the Queen of Navarre," the Duke of Guise had said.

And the vicomte had described these apartments as beyond the moat near the northern gate.

Raoul made his way about the building until he came to the gate designated.

A sentinel was there, pacing back and forth.

How to pass him?

Suddenly a window was thrown up in the little guard-house and some one called: "Maury!"

The sentinel approached the window and looked in, his back to Raoul. The latter was quick to see his opportunity, and, slipping noiselessly past the sentry, he entered the gate and crept cautiously along in the shadow of the palace walls.

The whole vast façade was in darkness, save where a light burned dimly in one balconied window.

This must be the place.

But how to hide? The moon was now out, and its clear rays were illuminating more and more brilliantly the scene.

There was not a nook capable of offering concealment.

Beneath the queen's balcony was a moat some ten feet wide and filled with water. This was flanked, on the side where Raoul was standing, by a low parapet not more than a foot high.

While he was considering what to do, the sound of approaching footsteps fell upon his ear.

No more time to waste. Something must be done and at once.

Raoul glanced over the parapet. On the other side was a descent to the moat of perhaps five feet, and there was a narrow, a very narrow strip of ground between the water and the foot of the wall.

Placing one hand upon the parapet, he vaulted lightly over, and managed to obtain a footing.

He was obliged to stoop a little, however, in order to prevent his head appearing above the stone-work.

He was in shadow and would probably not be discovered, unless some prying eye should scrutinize the place too closely.

The men he had heard coming approached swiftly, and paused just above him.

"This is the place," said one, in a low tone. "There is the Queen's balcony. But where is the duke?"

"Hush! No names!" said another, whose voice the chevalier recognized as that of the Vicomte de Vrissac. "He will be here presently."

As he spoke, he seated himself on the low parapet, almost immediately above the head of the man crouching below.

The Gascon scarce dared to breathe for fear of betraying himself. His position was most uncomfortable, and he wondered how long he should be able to retain it, if the duke should delay.

This was not the case, however, for it was a very short time before a rapid footstep was heard drawing near.

The vicomte rose to his feet, advancing a step to meet the new-comer, and Raoul dared to change his position a little. Then he strained his ears in order not to lose a syllable.

"Ah! gentlemen, you are prompt to the rendezvous," began Guise. "Vicomte, do they know why I have summoned here four trusty swords, as I know theirs to be?"

"Yes, monseigneur. We are all blindly at your disposal, and only await your will."

"By the beard of Saint Bridget! your grace, we are your faithful subjects."

Raoul recognized that voice, and thought to himself that he was not surprised that Goujon should be one of the company when any foul deed was to be done, although he would probably, for the sake of his skin, be a looker-on rather than a participant.

"You will not have long to wait now," said the duke. "The corridors are clear, and I will lead you to the apartment where the cursed Béarnais is. It will be best for me not to enter, for the sake of the future, much as I should like to give him the *coup de grâce* myself."

"You can trust us for that, monseigneur," remarked De Vrissac; "even," and he hesitated a little, "even as we trust you to hold us scatheless and to see that we obtain our just dues in the future."

"You have my word for that," replied the other, a trifle haughtily. "And if the word of a Guise is not sufficient, you can rely upon the gratitude of one who is higher in power than I am—*now*."

"That is more than enough. Pardon us, your grace, we did not mean to doubt——"

"By the corns of Saint Ursula, no!"

"Enough! enough!" interrupted Guise, impatiently. "We understand one another. Within the half-hour France will be free from her worst curse, the Prince of Béarn will have ceased to live. Woe to you, if you let him escape your daggers!"

A shiver of horror and indignation ran over the listening chevalier. So! His suspicions were correct. If there had been any doubt of it before, there was none now. This was a conspiracy to assassinate the King of Navarre.

"See! He is there!" continued the duke. "Do you see that long, black silhouette against the window? It is our man. No other in Paris has a nose like that. Come!—no! one moment. Leave one of your men here. When the deed is done, wave your hand from the balcony yonder. Then let him come to me with the news at the grand entrance of the Louvre."

There was a quick command from the vicomte, and then all the men but one moved away on their errand of blood.

Raoul remained quiet until he was sure that they were out of hearing, and then he raised his head cautiously until his eyes were above the parapet.

Standing with his back toward him was a squat, rotund figure which could be no other than that of the redoubtable Sergeant Goujon.

At once Raoul's resolution was taken, and to resolve was to act. First unloosening with quick, nervous fingers the scarf he wore about his waist above his sword-belt, he then lifted himself carefully over the parapet.

With cat-like step he approached the sergeant, but just as he was two paces from him the latter turned.

With a bound Raoul was upon him and, before he could make any outcry whatever, had caught him by the neck with one hand, and deftly wound the scarf about his mouth with the other, thus effectually gagging him.

Then pushing the terrified man toward the parapet, by main strength he flung him over into the moat below.

So far, so good! But the King of Navarre must be warned at once. It was useless to follow the conspirators. There was but one way—to scale the balcony by means of the thick ivy which clung close to the walls.

Without a moment's hesitation, the Gascon leaped over the parapet and dashed into the water. He could see the sergeant struggling a few yards below him.

Two or three strokes brought him to the other side. Seizing the ivy, he began to mount, clinging to the branches with hands and feet.

It was slow and painful work, and he was not more than half-way to the top, when he became aware of the approach of a sentinel on the other side of the moat.

Shaking the ivy over him, he paused in his ascent and remained motionless.

The sentinel passed on, and Raoul heard with a sigh of relief some distance away the cry:

"Half after ten, and all's well!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"THE KING OF NAVARRE IS HERE!"

MARGUERITE DE VALOIS, Princess of France and Queen of Navarre, was alone in her apartment in the Louvre.

She had dismissed her ladies of honor, and now was pacing up and down the room, her dark, level brows contracted in thought over her brilliant eyes.

Very lovely she looked, this star of the court, in her simple robe of violet satin, with no ornaments save a richly jewelled dagger which served to confine the bodice of her gown and which had been presented to her by her mother. It was a relic of the great De Medici family of Florence, and, could it have spoken, what strange tales it might have told!

Ever and anon she consulted a paper she held in her hand and on which were written these words:

"I beg you to receive me to-night at ten o'clock *alone*. I should not so far presume were it not a matter of vast importance on which I wish to consult your Majesty." HENRI OF NAVARRE."

What could her husband have to say to her to necessitate the writing of such a note? Were new plots on foot?

She knew the queen-mother and the Duke of Guise were his deadly enemies, and nothing was less likely than for them to rest without making further effort to remove the King of Navarre from the vicinity of the

King of France, over whom he was rapidly acquiring an influence.

She had promised her husband to be his ally, and she would keep her word, so far as lay in her power. How gallant he was! How brave! How different from the perfumed butterflies of the court! Each day she respected and admired him the more. Respect! Admiration! Was it not rather——

But here she checked her thoughts, and the bright color rushed hotly to her beautiful cheeks. Then she laughed aloud. What a subject for the satire of Monsieur de Brantôme! What, was the pearl of the court of France, at whose feet had sighed innumerable adorers, about to fall in love with her own husband, and a man too who had confessedly married her for motives of policy?

It was too absurd.

And yet why this quickened beating of the heart at the thought of the interview requested of her?

A low tap upon the door interrupted her reflections. She crossed the room to open it herself and to admit the very man she had been thinking of.

There was a happy look in the King of Navarre's eyes and a smile played about his thin lips.

"May I enter?"

"Why not? It is your Majesty's right."

"A right that I should never seek to enforce without your permission."

"If that is all that is required, enter freely, sire."

The king crossed the threshold of his wife's apartment for the first time, and closed the door behind him.

"Your Majesty looks happy to-night!" observed Marguerite, a little embarrassed, and, wondering more than ever what the coming interview might portend.

"And well I might, madame. Where think you I have been to-night?"

"How should I know?"

Henri's brow clouded a little.

"True!" he said, with just a suspicion of reproach in his tone. "You would be the last to know of my goings and comings, and perhaps even to be interested in them."

"You wrong me, sire."

"So! Then I will tell you. To consult Réné."

"My mother's astrologer?"

"Exactly."

"And what did he say? Did he cast your horoscope?"

"Yes. And told me many things. First, the least important, to me if not to others."

"And that?"

"That I should one day be King of France."

"Should you survive my brothers you would necessarily be that, both by human and divine law."

Henri's lips curved in a peculiar smile.

"Humph!" he said. "Perhaps by *cannon* law." And then added quickly: "Pardon me, I should not have said that."

"Why not? I am no child. In the due course of events, should heaven spare your life, you may have to fight for the throne, but your Majesty's ability will surely bring you success."

"I don't know," he rejoined thoughtfully. "Talent, genius even are only promises. To them must be joined a lucky star. When that fails, all fails."

"Let us pray that you were born under one, sire. But what else did Master Réné predict to you?"

The King of Navarre bent his eyes scrutinizingly upon his wife.

"Much," he said. "But, before I tell you, inform me why you have requested my presence here to-night."

Marguerite started, and looked at him in astonishment.

"I requested your presence?" she repeated. "On the contrary it was you who asked permission to come here. See! Here is your note."

And she gave him the slip of paper she still held in her hand.

As Henri glanced over it, it was his turn to be astounded.

"I do not understand," he said, slowly. "I received this from you this evening."

And drawing another letter from the pouch which hung at his belt, he handed it to her.

The paper contained these words:

"The Queen of Navarre requests the presence of her husband in her apartments at ten of the clock."

"I never wrote that," cried Marguerite, as she read the words.

"Nor did I write that," returned the King of Navarre, indicating the epistle signed by his name.

Marguerite started to her feet.

"Oh! Henri, this is some plot!" she exclaimed, fixing upon her husband her lovely, dark eyes, full of a vague fear.

"Nonsense!" laughed the King of Navarre, after a moment's reflection. "More likely it is some trick of one of your mischievous maids of honor, a trick, ma foi, which I am only too willing to forgive. Well, since I am here, may I remain a few moments? I will be as entertaining as I can."

"As your Majesty pleases," replied Marguerite, sinking down upon a sofa, although her fears were only partially allayed.

The king placed himself beside her.

For a few moments, nothing was said. Although Marguerite's eyes were lowered, she could feel that her husband was gazing intently at her.

At last, when the silence was becoming almost unbearable to her, Henri spoke.

"Madame," he began, slowly, "whatever many persons may have said, I think that our marriage is a good marriage. I stand well with you, you stand well with me."

He paused, as if waiting for a response. Marguerite, who was toying nervously with the hilt of the dagger which confined her dress, was decidedly embarrassed. She scarcely knew what this preamble meant, but she managed to say:

"You know, sire, that you have my friendship."

"Friendship! Ventre-Saint-Gris!" ejaculated the king, with a scornful gesture. "What is friendship? A duet in which both voices ring false. No! no! What I want is something more than friendship."

As he said these words, he took her hand, which Marguerite did not withdraw. Confident now of the ground on which she stood, she was fast recovering her self-possession.

"Well, what do you say?" he continued.

"Say?" she replied, smiling—"I say that your Majesty is an enigma."

"An enigma! So are all men. But, mordi! Marguerite, if men are enigmas, women are—*two*."

Marguerite laughed outright.

"A compliment to our sex, sire, which I scarcely expected from you."

Henri laughed too.

"Since my marriage I have learned wisdom. But a

truce to badinage. I told you of other predictions made by the astrologer. There was one in particular which was more interesting to me than all the rest. Can you imagine what it was?"

"No," replied Marguerite, with admirably assumed carelessness, although her heart was beating much more quickly than was its wont.

Henri leaned toward her, and spoke in low, pleading tones:

"He said that one day I should win the love of my wife."

Although the Queen of Navarre knew that the prediction was already fulfilled, she was too practised a coquette to yield and acknowledge all at once. She preferred to enjoy her triumph and torture him a little first.

So her only reply was a low silvery laugh.

Despite the fact that he had a keen intuition into the minds and natures of others, Henri was for once baffled. He could not explain the meaning of that laugh. Was it amusement? incredulity? what?

At all events it increased his passion twofold, as its cunning author had calculated it would.

He seized both her hands and drew her close to him, compelling her to turn her face toward him. Her eyes remained persistently lowered, but a bewitching, tantalizing smile lingered about the red lips.

"I love you, Marguerite, I love you," he murmured, ardently.

Now she *did* raise her eyes, full of almost childlike wonder.

"Oh, sire, what are you saying?"

"The truth, Margot, the truth!"

She was on the very point of yielding, and confessing

her own secret, when a scrambling noise on the balcony startled them, interrupting the love-making and bringing both of them to their feet.

The next moment a man leaped through the window into the room.

Marguerite uttered a low cry of alarm, and, with a brow black as night and a muttered curse, Henri strode forward to confront the intruder.

But the other, doffing his hat and exposing the face of the Chevalier de Puycadère, arrested him with a quick gesture and a breathless exclamation of:

"Fly, sire, fly! They are coming!"

"Monsieur de Puycadère!" cried the king in mingled astonishment and anger. "What means this unseemly intrusion into the queen's apartments? Who are coming?"

"A band of men to assassinate you."

The queen turned pale to the lips, but Henri only uttered a scornful ejaculation.

In as few words as possible, Raoul told all that he knew, and then, turning to Marguerite, added:

"In the name of heaven, madame, order him to fly!"

Marguerite darted forward and caught her husband's hand.

"Yes, yes, Henri, go! You have already delayed too long! Hark, some one is mounting the staircase. Go! go! For my sake! Henri! for my sake!"

"For your sake!"

"For mine! Listen! I love you!"

Forgetful of the chevalier's presence, the king threw his arms about his wife and pressed his lips to hers.

At the same moment the door leading into the corridor was stealthily tried.

Raoul sprang forward and pushed to the bolt.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Marguerite, tearing herself from her husband's arms.

Instantly the king's expression changed. He was now on the alert, quick to plan, quick to act.

"Where does that door lead to?" he asked, indicating another than the one which was now being tried again with more force.

"To the room of the maids of honor."

"And it has another exit?"

"Yes."

The conspirators had doubtless discovered that the door was bolted and were trying to force it with their shoulders, for the panels were shaken and creaked heavily.

"There is a detachment of musketeers in the guard room below," said the king. "Time to summon them, and I return. Monsieur le Chevalier, remain! They can scarcely break in before I am here."

And without further delay, he vanished into the next room.

"Open! open!" came a voice which Raoul recognized as that of De Vrissac. "Open quickly! There is danger!"

The queen placed her finger to her lips.

"Open!" once more came the demand, to which again no answer was returned. Crash! The door shook beneath the shock and the bolt started from its socket.

Raoul sprang forward, but the queen seized him by the arm.

"No! no!" she said, in a hurried whisper. "It would be needless bloodshed! Leave all to me! Go there!"

And before he could remonstrate or resist, she had pushed him behind the hangings of the window.

"I, your queen, command you to remain there!"

The next instant the door fell inward with a loud noise, and the Vicomte de Vrissac, followed by three others, all with drawn swords, rushed into the chamber.

They paused and drew back a little, however, as they saw confronting them the solitary figure of the Queen of Navarre.

Erect and dauntless she faced them, her cheeks flushed and her dark eyes gleaming and glowing like coals of fire.

"What means this, messieurs?" she demanded haughtily. "How dare you thus invade the privacy of a daughter of France?"

For an instant every man of them felt a thrill of shame and involuntarily doffed his hat.

But the feeling was only momentary, and the vicomte quickly realized all that was at stake. To retreat now would be ruin.

He gave a keen glance about the apartment, and then answered, respectfully:

"Pardon, your Majesty, our impetuosity, but danger threatened the King of Navarre, and——"

The queen's lip curled scornfully.

"Indeed! Were the King of Navarre in danger," she interrupted, with the same brave, defiant manner, "he would know how to defend himself, and would scarcely accept the aid of his avowed enemy. Monsieur de Vrissac."

"Your Majesty wrongs me. If——"

"You see, the King of Navarre is not here. Seek him elsewhere."

The vicomte was beginning to fear that the scheme had miscarried, when his eye fell upon a hat, the feathers of which were clasped with a jewelled crown. It

lay upon a table where Henri had cast it upon his entrance.

With a cry of joy, De Vrissac snatched it up.

"Henri de Bourbon has been here! He is here!" he exclaimed exultantly. "With your Majesty's permission," and there was a covert sneer in the tone, "we will search the room!"

Raoul de Puycadère had listened with rage and impatience to the preceding scene. It little suited his temperament to be in hiding thus, and, at the vicomte's threat to search the queen's apartment, his hot Gascon blood got the better of him.

Drawing his sword from its scabbard, he thrust aside the curtains and stepped forth from his place of concealment.

"For shame! Monsieur le Vicomte!" he exclaimed angrily. "Before you subject a princess of France to such indignity, you must first reckon with me!"

For an instant, De Vrissac was thunderstruck at this sudden and unlooked-for apparition of his dearest foe.

Then an expression of fiendish delight swept across his face.

Leaning forward with a quick movement, and speaking with one claw-like finger extended and a malevolent gleam in his eyes, he said:

"At last we meet, Monsieur le Chevalier, but the saints forbid that I should rob the hangman of his due. Madame," turning to the queen, "we came here expecting to find a husband, and we find a lover! If the Prince of Béarn——"

But before the sentence could be finished, and before Raoul could make a movement to avenge this insult to his queen, a stern, commanding voice rang out:

"Hold! Who speaks of the Prince of Béarn? The King of Navarre is here!"

In the doorway stood Henri de Bourbon, and behind him some half a score of the king's guards.

"I am here! Finish your words, Monsieur le Vicomte, that I may hear them!"

He advanced into the room, closely followed by the soldiers.

The other conspirators shrank back in alarm, but De Vrissac, with a snarl like a wolf brought to bay, gave a quick glance around him.

The musketeers had come forward, and were between him and the chevalier.

He could not reach him.

There was one victim before him, however, on whom he might still wreak his vengeance and so fulfil the object for which he had come.

With uplifted dagger, he rushed upon the King of Navarre.

Quick as his movement was, however, there was one who was more swift to think and act than he.

Marguerite of Valois saw the blade of the deadly weapon gleam over the head of her husband, and, with a lightning-like action, she plucked the poniard from her corsage, and struck the would-be assassin full in the breast.

Although her attack deflected the vicomte's blow, Henri did not escape wholly unscathed.

The dagger of De Vrissac struck his lip, drawing blood.

Simultaneously the soldiers had rushed forward, and the conspirators, including De Vrissac, taken by surprise, were in their hands and disarmed, almost before they knew what had happened.

Not in the least disconcerted by the attack upon him, Henri wiped the blood from his lips, remarking quietly:

"I have heard from many mouths that I had enemies in Paris, now I have proof of it from *my own.*"

Then, bending upon his wife a look which softened the whole expression of his face, he said in a voice audible only to her ears:

"Sweetheart, you have saved my life! Hereafter it is yours to do with as you will!"

But an onlooker would scarcely believe it was the same man who, a second afterward, bent upon the baffled conspirators so stern a gaze.

"Ventre-Saint-Gris! The next time select a more easy prey. Go! now! the whole of you, to the devil!" He paused an inappreciable second, and then bowing, with sarcastic courtesy, added: "Gentlemen, if you please!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LOVE THE CONQUEROR!

Once more was Raoul de Puycadère in concealment in one of the gypsies' haunts.

After the frustration of the plot to kill the King of Navarre, for him to have remained in the Louvre would have been more than dangerous.

Already a price was upon his head, and, when it became known to Catherine de Medicis, as undoubtedly it would be, that it was through his intervention that the hated Béarnais was still alive, it scarcely admitted of a doubt but that his capture would be sought with redoubled ardor.

So, after the removal of the would-be assassins, both Henri de Bourbon and Marguerite de Valois, hereafter his wife in reality as well as in name, were obliged to confess that it would be safer for the chevalier, for the present at least, to seek some other asylum.

All the next day he had remained hidden, and now the night had come.

It had been a solitary vigil, and it was with a feeling of relief to have his solitude broken in upon that he hailed the advent of Mirza and Pharos about an hour after sundown.

"Monsieur le Chevalier," began the Tzigana, "I promised to keep watch and ward for you, and let you know when there might be a chance for you to see Mademoiselle de Vrissac alone."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Raoul, eagerly starting to his feet. "Go on!"

"Fifteen minutes ago, she was on the terrace of the gardens of the Hôtel de Bassompierre, and——"

Without waiting to hear further, Raoul snatched up his cloak, and, with a hasty farewell, absolutely ran from the place.

Pharos laughed, but Mirza looked grave.

"His impetuosity will ruin him," she said, "but we must watch over him. Go at once, Pharos. Summon the tribe. Let them come one by one, and conceal themselves in the duchess' gardens. At all events, if aught goes wrong, we shall be there."

With his heart on fire, Raoul strode through the dimly lighted streets on his way toward the Hôtel de Bassompierre. It would have been well for him had he been less absorbed, had he seen the little red, ferret-like eyes that were bent upon him as he turned into the quay, and had he known of the triumphant thought of Sergeant Goujon:

"At last he is in my power again! This will be worth at least fifty golden crowns from the duchess."

. . . . . .

The full September moon flung its rays with reckless prodigality over the peaceful gardens of the Hôtel de Bassompierre, touching with silver the leaves of the magnificent old trees, and making the jets of the fountain sparkle like fairy money as they fell with a musical tinkle into the marble basins below.

Upon the terrace, in front of the lighted windows of the house, stood Gabrielle de Vrissac. One white arm, from which the sleeve of her pale green satin robe had fallen back, was resting upon the balustrade, and she

was gazing half dreamily down upon the quiet scene beneath.

So might Juliet have leaned over her balcony in the warm glow of the soft Italian night, but, alas! there was no Romeo visible here to stir the pulsations of her heart

Not even the most vivid imagination could transform into a lover the thin, elderly man in his severe robe of black, who stood by her side.

"Poor child! Poor child!" he was saying, sympathetically. "It was a hard position to be placed in, but the vicomte escaped and is now in Paris. I saw him but yesterday at the Louvre; and you have survived the trials of the road, and are safe once more under your aunt's protection."

"It was a terrible journey," said Gabrielle, with a shudder. "I knew not at any moment when we might be again attacked."

"It is over now. All's well that ends well."

Mademoiselle de Vrissac started and turned toward the old man. The color was warm upon her cheeks and her luminous eyes were lifted full of varying expression to his.

"Ay, Master Pare, but all is not over. I have trusted you. You know all. He was wounded, he was ill when he left the château, at my bidding—at *my* bidding, but I could do naught else. And where is he now? In Paris? Then every moment he is in danger of discovery. And the duchess is more inexorable than ever. Her one thought is the recapture of the chevalier and his—his punishment. Oh! Master Pare! It is I who have been the unfortunate cause of all!"

With a burst of emotion, she let her head sink upon the shoulder of the old man, who had taken her hands in his.

"Patience, dear child, patience," he said tenderly and soothingly. "No one can know what an hour may bring forth."

As he spoke, he was thinking to himself:

"I have delayed long enough. The suspense is over. I need watch the dread balance no longer; it has turned at last, at last! Now to act!"

He continued to speak veiled words of hope to the young girl, until her vague fears began to fly away, and then he took his leave, promising to see her again shortly.

Mademoiselle de Vrissac, cheered and comforted in spite of herself, remained alone upon the terrace.

The sound of the retreating footsteps of the physician had scarcely died away, when she was startled by the softly breathed utterance of her name:

"Gabrielle!"

And immediately a figure glided from behind one of the fountains and ran lightly up the steps to her side.

With a joyous throb of her heart, she recognized Raoul de Puycadère, and made a movement as if to throw herself into his arms; but almost instantly she paused, and murmured, in much agitation:

"Raoul! Raoul! you—free! Is it possible? How came you here?"

"Love has wings, dearest," said Raoul happily, as he feasted his eyes upon the rare loveliness of her exquisite face, "and soars above every obstacle."

"Oh! hush! hush!" exclaimed Gabrielle, with a fearsome glance about her. "Do not speak so lightly of a terror which is not yet passed—the future——"

"Think not of it, my beloved, so long as the present hour remains with us."

He was close beside her now, and, unchecked, his strong arm had stolen about her slender waist.

But all Gabrielle's fears were up in arms.

"Raoul! Raoul!" she whispered imploringly. "You must not remain here. Let me implore you to go; if possible, to leave Paris. You saved my life! I now urge you to save your own."

"By what means?" he asked tenderly, bending over her, and holding her still more closely in his arms.

"Flight."

"Again! I obeyed you once at Vrissac. Now, no! I cannot go."

"Raoul! Raoul! You do not know what you say. The duchess is using every means to discover you. The friends of our house join in the cry, and the king himself urges the pursuit."

Raoul laughed.

"I thank his Majesty," he said, with light scorn, "and I could expect no less from the hero of Saint Bartholomew."

Then, with an entire change of manner, he lowered his head closer and closer until his mustache brushed her cheek, and continued, his voice vibrant with the tenderest feeling:

"Gabrielle, my sweetheart, my own, I have weighed all and know the full extent of my danger."

"And you will fly?" she asked eagerly.

He smiled, and shook his head.

"No," he answered, with gentle firmness.

With a quick movement, Gabrielle tore herself from his embrace, and stood before him, twisting her hands nervously together in her fear and the apparent powerlessness of her attempts to influence him.

"Go! go!" she cried, desperately. "It is courting

doom to remain here! In this house, look for no pity, no concealment! To the ears of the duchess, the very pictures of her ancestors have each a voice and cry aloud for vengeance! The very stones beneath her feet echo the cry! There is death upon us—death swift and sure! Fly! fly! The friends who have helped you thus far can help you still further, but not here! not here!"

She paused, breathless with excitement, her eyes glued upon his face, only to read there that her appeal had availed naught.

"Gabrielle, *you* are my life!" was his only response.

"Raoul!"

"Listen to me, beloved!" he went on rapidly, and the note of appeal in his voice was stronger even than hers had been. "You have told me that you loved me, but you have not told me that you would forget all and crown my existence by becoming my wife. Do this and——"

A low cry broke from her lips, cutting short his words.

"I dare not! I dare not!" she faltered brokenly.

"Then here I remain. I——"

But before he could finish, he was interrupted by a lithe figure bounding swiftly up the steps. It was Mirza, the Tzigana, her face shining pale in the moonlight.

"Monsieur! Monsieur le Chevalier!" she panted. "Your presence here is known! The soldiers are upon your track! There is not a moment to be lost! Quick! Follow me!"

But, to her unbounded astonishment, the chevalier merely shrugged his shoulders.

"No! I remain!" he said.

"Remain, monsieur! Impossible!"

"Nay, I cannot go."

And he turned again to Gabrielle. There is a time in the life of every lover when he becomes a desperate gambler and he risks his all upon a single throw of the die. And so it was with Raoul now. If Gabrielle should persist in her refusal to marry him, what mattered his life?

But, before he could move a step, Mirza clutched him feverishly by the sleeve, and pointed across the gardens, to where, some little distance up the river, a dim uncertain, reddish light was visible, and at the same moment there broke upon their ears the dull, far-off, muffled tolling of an alarm-bell.

Mademoiselle de Vrissac gave one horrified glance in the direction indicated by the gypsy's finger, and sank down upon a stone bench, covering her face with her hands.

"Look, look, monsieur!" cried Mirza. "The soldiers are descending the river in boats. Yonder glare comes from their torches. In ten minutes they will have entered the gardens."

The chevalier lightly shook off her touch, and it was with an insouciance which was tinged with something almost like gayety, that he replied:

"Ten minutes! The tortoises! I am grateful to them for giving me so much. Farewell, my good girl, and let me steal a few golden moments from the little yet left me."

But, with a spring, Mirza darted in front of him and approached Gabrielle, who, pale and trembling, lifted her head without rising.

"Oh! dear lady!" implored the Tzigana. "Do you speak, and——"

But Raoul had moved forward, and placing himself between them, prevented any further appeal.

"No, you know not what you are asking," he said, resolutely. "I am not ungrateful, kindest, best of friends, but—farewell."

Mirza hesitated a moment, glancing in her distress from one to the other. "It is useless," she thought, "and there is but one way to save him, now—but one." And, as if taken with a sudden resolve, she turned quickly, and ran down the short flight of steps to where Pharos and Ismael were awaiting her.

"What keeps him?" asked the former, in an impatient whisper.

"Chut!" responded Mirza, with a gesture of silence, and indicating the terrace where Raoul had thrown himself at Gabrielle's feet. "The strongest of all fetters —*love!* We can do nothing here. But I have a plan. Come!"

And, with Mirza in advance, the three Bohemians glided away into the shadows.

For a moment there was silence on the terrace. Raoul seemed to have forgotten all save that he was in the presence of the woman he adored.

Then, borne on a sudden puff of wind, the tolling of the alarm-bell grew louder, and at the same moment came sounds as of a distant shouting.

As if moved by a spring, Mademoiselle de Vrissac started to her feet, and all the momentary lassitude borne of her despair vanished.

"Raoul! Listen! oh, listen!" she exclaimed in a low, yet clear and vibrant voice. "All Paris is aroused."

De Puycadère rose to his feet.

"Mordiou!" he said, with a contemptuous wave of his arm toward the river, where the red glare from the

torches was growing stronger and stronger; "those hounds were fleshed at Saint Bartholomew. Cry 'Huguenot!' and all rush open-mouthed upon the scent."

Now, clear above all other sounds, rang out not far away several shrill whistles in quick succession, followed by the melancholy note, rising and falling, of a horn.

"My friends the Bohemians!" continued Raoul, with a laugh. "Sure sign of a storm when those wild birds ride the wave. Mordiou! There will be many a purse cut in Paris to-night."

But Gabrielle had not been listening.

"The shouts are nearer," she said, her face turned toward the river," and see! the glare increases! Raoul! Raoul! do you not hear them, nearer and nearer?"

But Raoul made neither movement nor response.

She looked at him intently for a moment, with her whole soul shining from her eyes, and then, with a vehement gesture, as if casting all else to the wind, she flew toward him and cast her arms about him.

"Come, Raoul! come!" she cried, with a passionate outburst of feeling. "We will fly together!"

"Ah!" and in the cry was all the rapture of a man who had gained Paradise itself.

"Come! come!" continued Gabrielle, the words falling quick and sharp in her intense excitement. "Yes, beneath my feet I trample all the ties of kindred and home! Love is dearer than them all! Come, Raoul, come! You have friends, let us seek them! quick! Ah!" and she started back a little, releasing her hold upon him. "It is too late! I hear the clash of arms and see the glitter of pikes! Merciful heavens! They are here!"

Raoul hurried to the balustrade and shaded his eyes with his hand.

"They are landing farther down at the water-gate," he said. "The prey should be of value to have so many in its pursuit."

"Raoul! Stay not here!" exclaimed Gabrielle, coming swiftly to his side. "There is still hope. In all this house, there is but one place over whose threshold the boldest foot would not dare to venture."

"And that?"

"My chamber."

Raoul started with an exclamation of horror and indignant refusal.

"Never!" he declared violently. "Never! A thousand deaths, rather than one slanderous tongue should smirch the whiteness of your name. Gabrielle! If I live, you will be my wife?"

"Yes! yes!"

"Then, farewell! I will meet these men as a soldier should—half-way. Farewell! If I must die, strong in the knowledge of your love, I die content!"

He started to move toward the steps, but Gabrielle was before him.

"No! no!" she cried, frantically detaining him. "You shall not go, or if you go I follow! My breast shall be your buckler and one shot shall carry death to us both! This way! This way!"

And before he could remonstrate, she had dragged him into the house.

Across the spacious apartments, up one corridor and down another she led him, almost running in her wild impatience, until they came to a long, dimly lighted gallery, the walls of which were hung with full-length portraits, male and female, in the dress of the various periods of French history.

"I was mad not to have thought of this before,"

gasped Mademoiselle de Vrissac, almost breathless with her rapid progress. "That picture," crossing as she spoke to a portrait of a huge, bearded man in the garb of a crusader—"that picture masks a secret passage by which we may gain unperceived a place of shelter, the only one. The spring is here. Yes, it moves, it moves! We are saved."

The picture had slid quickly aside, only to reveal what froze Gabrielle's blood in her veins. The cry of joy died away on her lips, utter, hopeless despair took possession of her, and with a moan of anguish she sank upon her knees, with hands clasped and eyes fixed as one who looks upon a spectre.

Within the aperture, her eyes gleaming with a cold, merciless glitter and her lips wreathed in a triumphant smile, stood—*the Duchess de Bassompierre.*

CHAPTER XXIX.

"THERE IS A WEAPON! DEFEND YOURSELF."

No words can depict the emotions of Raoul de Puycadère at this unexpected and terrible apparition of the woman into whose life, against his will though it was, he had brought such terrible sorrow.

Had his life depended upon it, he could not have moved, but remained motionless with his gaze riveted upon those haughty features, irradiated as they now were by an unholy joy, the anticipated delight of a vengeance soon to be sated.

For an instant there was silence in the gallery, a silence broken only by the shivering breathing of Gabrielle.

The duchess was the first to speak.

"The plan was well contrived," she said, with cold, biting sarcasm, "but you had forgotten *me* in your counsels."

Then, with firm, slow step, she left her position at the entrance of the secret passage and came into the room. The panel slid back into place with a click behind her.

Sweeping past Gabrielle, who still remained upon her knees crouched against the wall, she advanced toward the unhappy chevalier, and stopped just before him, confronting him with the same look of mingled sternness and exultation.

Involuntarily his eyes fell before her gaze

"Once more we meet, Raoul de Puycadère," began the duchess, slowly. "You cannot escape me now. What foolish confidence has led you back into this house? The boldest hunter when he has stricken down the cub of the lioness hesitates to face its mother in her den."

The chevalier's head was bent, and, despite all endeavors, he could not raise his eyes to meet those of the heartbroken, vindictive woman. But he essayed to speak.

"Madame, I——"

"I spare you the reply," interrupted the duchess haughtily, with a disdainful glance at the kneeling form of her niece, "and will guess the reason that has led you to rush thus blindfold upon your destruction."

She paused, and as her eyes fell again upon the chevalier, the enforced calmness which had thus far distinguished her bearing deserted her. All her hopeless grief, all her savage thirst for vengeance, welled up in her heart and overwhelmed her in its flood. Her eyes blazed with sombre fire and two red spots burned darkly in her cheeks. She towered above the bowed figure of the man before her, whom she at last held in her power, like some superb, avenging fury. And when she spoke, her voice was hoarse and terrible in its accents of remorseless denouncement. So might some bloodthirsty queen of a savage tribe have condemned her enemy to the stake.

"Hear me, wretched man! Hear me with terror, that I may revel in your agony, hear me while I pronounce that death inevitable which now hangs over you."

A low moan broke from Gabrielle's white lips, a moan that went to Raoul's heart with a keener pang

than all the furious words hurled at him by the duchess, but the latter paid no attention, if indeed she heard, but continued, her excitement increasing every moment:

"Was it not enough to have had the fair protection of my house, that I, the lonely mother, stretched out my protecting hands even when your own blood-stained sword cried out against you? My sacred word was pledged, and I gave you liberty and life, and sent you forth unharmed."

"You did, madame," murmured Raoul, softly.

"But, while doing this, I swore that if, during the wretched life still left me, I saw your face again, or came but to the knowledge of your hiding-place, I would pursue you with my direst vengeance!"

While the duchess was speaking, Gabrielle had risen slowly to her feet, and now, approaching her aunt, she laid her hand timidly upon her arm.

"Ah! madame!" she said, in low, imploring tones. But the duchess started and recoiled as if an adder had touched her. Turning upon Gabrielle a face convulsed with passion, she hissed through her clenched teeth:

"Back! Back, I say, and touch me not, degenerate girl! Unworthy member of a noble house, would you dare again to speak of your love to me?"

At this Gabrielle raised her head proudly.

"To the world!" she said, defiantly. "I love Raoul de Puycadère!"

And, crossing to the chevalier, she took her stand by his side, resolved to share his fortunes for weal or for woe.

The duchess made a movement as if to strike her down to her feet, but, by a mighty effort restraining herself, she rejoined with a bitter sneer:

"You love him! So be it! And I, in the very greatness of my hate, call up the pale figure of Death to place between you a barrier eternal!"

As if in answer to her invocation, a clash of arms was heard through one of the windows which was open and overlooked the gardens, and the crimson light of waving torches below flashed through, and for a moment illuminated the scene as if in a bath of blood.

"Ah!" cried the duchess, her voice rising almost to a shriek. "You hear! you see! I called on Death! He answers to my summons!"

"Aunt! aunt!" cried Gabrielle, clasping her hands to her head in horror.

"No more! My heart is adamant!"

But Gabrielle, wild with terror for her lover, flew to her and once more grasped her robe.

"I must! I will speak!" she sobbed. "Love is stronger than hate."

"Love stronger than hate!" retorted the duchess, with a fierce laugh, and thrusting the girl roughly from her. "Love is a word we write in sand, and which the first rough wind disperses into air, but hate is carved with steel upon the marble of the tomb."

Gabrielle stretched out her hands in an agony of supplication. Her hair had become loosened and fell in golden masses about her white face, and her eyes were wild and staring with fear.

"Pity! ah! pity!" she gasped.

In an instant Raoul was by her side, and had taken her cold hand in his.

"Do not plead for me, Gabrielle," he said quickly.

The duchess laughed, a ghastly laugh that froze the blood in the veins of the miserable girl before her.

"Pity!" she echoed, scornfully. "Pity! What pity

had this man upon Paul de Bassompierre when he murdered him?"

Raoul started.

"Madame, madame, do with me what you will," he said, with dignity, "but do not stain a yet unsullied name with base dishonor. The duke, your son, fell in——"

"In a duel! I know! I know!" interrupted the duchess, with intense bitterness. "He was killed according to the code, no rule infringed, no circumstance omitted. You, a man, skilled in the use of arms, crossed steel with a boy—a boy, I say, upon whose chin a beard had scarcely dawned. You gave him no time, not even to call upon that mother whose fingers should have closed his eyes, but thrust his life out with a lunge."

How cruelly unjust this was Raoul knew only too well. The duke had come to his death by an accident due to his own folly. But what would it avail to say this now?

"Alas! Would it had been my life in place of his!" he said sorrowfully, and with entire sincerity.

The duchess made a gesture of derisive scorn.

"And you talk to me of mercy!" she proceeded, with no allusion to Raoul's words. "Expect it rather from the wolf whom you have robbed of her cubs! Demand it of the eagle whose nest you have pillaged, when she hovers over you with beak and claw prepared to rend," and her fingers clinched as if in the very action—"to rend!"

"Yet——" began Gabrielle.

But the duchess waved her aside.

"Away! By all the miseries a bereaved mother suffers, I will have justice on this man. His own mad folly has placed him in my hands, and, come what may, I will feed the famine of my vengeance!"

She moved a step or two toward the open window, and then paused and turned toward Gabrielle who was clinging to Raoul.

"You would make that man your husband? As you please, but the block shall stand behind the altar, and the headsman beside the priest. Without there!" But before she could reach the window, below which the tumult clearly showed that the soldiers were, Gabrielle, breaking from Raoul, who sought to detain her, had sprung in front of her and barred the way.

The whole attitude and expression of the girl had undergone an instantaneous and marvellous change. She was no longer fearful, but her head was held erect, and her flashing eyes met those of the duchess without flinching.

"To call in those bloodhounds, you must first strike me down!" she cried in clear, ringing tones. "Nay! I fear you not! Is it for you to speak of justice, who ere you grasp the sword have thrown aside the balance?" She paused, and then, with her eyes still fixed on the duchess, continued in a gentler tone: "You are my mother's sister, and have been as a second mother to me—show pity then, for it is for *my* life I plead."

The duchess' expression softened a trifle. Despite herself, she could not but remember what this girl had once been to her—almost a daughter.

"Yours?"

"The blow you aim at him strikes me."

"Let me pass!"

But there were not in the tone the inflexible sternness and tenacity of purpose there had been.

Gabrielle gave her one long, steady look, and then moved aside.

"Pass, then, and summon thither the real assassins.

We will await them hand in hand. My choice is made. My home is here."

And she flung herself into Raoul's outstretched arms.

The duchess glanced toward the window, and then stood irresolute.

"Girl! girl! Can you forget——" she began.

"All!" exclaimed Gabrielle passionately, her eyes sunk in those of Raoul. "I see nothing, can recognize nothing but my love."

"Gabrielle! Gabrielle!" murmured Raoul, straining her close to his breast. "Would that I had words to show you my heart."

"Your heart is linked with mine, and cannot be divided."

Raoul dashed one hand across his eyes to brush away the mist of tears that blinded him. Then, still encircling Gabrielle, he turned to the duchess with a sort of feverish desperation.

"Madame, madame, do with me what you will," he said, brokenly. "I cannot think! I cannot see! Let some hand, even though it be the hand of the executioner, guide me out of this dismal maze."

The duchess did not move or speak. All the fierce excitement of her anger had vanished, the color had faded from her cheeks, leaving her pale, worn, and weary.

Then from within the house itself came the tramp of feet and the clamor of voices. No need to call now. The soldiers had already penetrated it in pursuit of their prey.

The duchess wavered a moment, and came hurriedly toward the lovers, clasped in one another's arms.

Then, struggling with her emotion, and speaking with an effort, she said:

"Raoul de Puycadère, of all the edifice that formed our house, you have left me but a ruin; you have robbed me of a son, and now would steal away the last link that might bind me to the world—my—my daughter! Renounce Gabrielle! Swear to me that you will see her no more, and——"

She paused, the words choking her in her throat.

"Renounce Gabrielle!" cried Raoul, clasping the young girl still more closely to him. "Renounce Gabrielle! A dozen lives were too dearly purchased at such a price!"

"Die, then!" exclaimed the duchess, turning angrily away.

But Gabrielle wrenched herself away from Raoul, and flung herself passionately at her aunt's feet.

"Spare him! Spare him! You weep. Ah! do not turn away! I see you weep. Your hands too tremble. Do not withdraw it, but let it rest in mine! Spare him, my mother, spare *me!*"

It was a terrible moment for the duchess. Her whole mood had changed. Although her sorrow for the dead was no whit abated, she recognized at last, though vaguely, her duty to the living. It was a cruel alternative, and on either side her heart was rent in twain. She had called on Death to aid her, and now she shrank appalled before the power she had invoked.

Closer and nearer came the shouts and cries of those she would gladly have welcomed a short time before.

In another instant the soldiers would be in the gallery.

Releasing herself from Gabrielle, she turned to Raoul.

"Chevalier de Puycadère," she said hurriedly, "you have injured me beyond the possibility of forgiveness.

It is not given me to pardon, but I—I cannot be your executioner!"

Then, with a rapid step, as though fearful to hesitate an instant lest she should repent of her determination, she crossed to where upon the wall, between two of the pictures, was arranged a stack of weapons.

Quickly detaching a sword, she flung it at the chevalier's feet.

"There!" she cried, as the door at the upper end of the gallery was thrown open. "There is a weapon! Defend yourself! And, at least, die like a soldier!"

CHAPTER XXX.

WON AT LAST!

With a loud cry, a very *rugissement* of joy, Raoul snatched up the sword. Death seemed inevitable, but all events he would die, like a worthy scion of his family, by the soldier's weapon, and not by the axe of the headsman.

The tumult outside was deafening. His enemies were close at hand. Setting his teeth hard, he threw himself into a position of defence, determined to sell his life as dearly as possible.

In an agony of fear, Gabrielle clung to the duchess.

The immense doors at the end of the gallery were flung open with a resounding clatter. It was not soldiers, however, who rushed and struggled in a confused mass down the short flight of steps. In a sort of billow surged down a band of Bohemians, led by Pharos and Ismael. Their garments were girded about them as if for battle, each man was armed with knife, club, or dagger, and on every face was an expression of wild ferocity.

Immediately after them came with martial tread a company of soldiers, who halted in double ranks at the top of the steps.

Then among them appeared for an instant the burly form and scarlet face of Sergeant Goujon.

"There he is!" he screamed. "Fire upon him!"

And he disappeared again behind his men.

"To your ranks, children of Egypt," shouted Pharos, "and pay back fire with steel!"

The soldiers levelled their arquebuses, but, before they could obey the sergeant's command, Gabrielle had thrown herself in front of the chevalier, and the duchess had advanced, her hand raised with a gesture of command.

The soldiers paused, not daring to fire for fear of injuring one of the women.

At this the sergeant, fearful of being balked of his prey and so losing the promised reward, forgot for once his prudence and appeared once more amid the ranks of his men.

"Fire!" he commanded, angrily.

But, as the soldiers still hesitated, he snatched an arquebuse from one of them and pointed it at the chevalier.

"By the bones of Beelzebub, he shall not escape me again!"

But, before he could fire, the piece was struck upward, he himself hurled violently to the ground, and, dashing aside all obstacles, there pressed forward a richly dressed man of marked physiognomy—brilliant-eyed, thin-lipped and with a nose like an eagle's beak.

A short distance from the foot of the steps he paused and faced the soldiers.

"You know me!" he cried, in clarion-like tones. "Lower your muskets. I command you!"

Instantly the soldiers obeyed the order; and the gypsies shrank back confusedly to right and left as they recognized the gallant King of Navarre.

With a slower step, Henri advanced to the little group, composed of Raoul, Gabrielle and the duchess.

Mademoiselle de Vrissac was white and trembling,

but a new hope sprang up in her heart at sight of the new-comer.

Doffing his plumed hat, Henri said with a laugh:

"I was just in time, it seems. Another moment, chevalier, and it might have been too late."

Then, turning to the duchess, he asked gravely and courteously:

"Madame la Duchesse, do you still desire the death of this young man, my equerry?"

The duchess essayed to speak, but for a moment without success. At last, she managed to say:

"He is the murderer of my son."

"No, madame, neither he nor any one else was the murderer or even the slayer of your son." He paused a moment to mark the effect of his words, and then continued very slowly: "Summon up all your courage, madame, for you need it now. There is a surprise in store for you, a great, a joyful surprise."

As he spoke he waved his hand in a sort of signal.

In answer to his gesture, through the ranks of the soldiers and down the steps, came slowly the king's physician, and leaning on his arm was a young man whose handsome face was very pale.

A great shout went up from the Bohemians, massed on either side.

"The Duke de Bassompierre!"

But above it all rang out one piercing shriek, the cry of the mother, whose son was restored to her, whose dead was alive.

She tottered forward, but her strength failed her and she would have fallen, had not Raoul caught her.

In another moment he placed her gently in the arms of her son.

For a brief instant she lay as one dead, and then her

eyes slowly opened to meet those of Paul de Bassompierre bent lovingly upon her.

"Am I awake?" she murmured. "Your voice alone can prove it. Speak! speak! or I shall die!"

"Mother!"

"My son! he lives!" sobbed the duchess, and there were tears in the eyes of all that heard her, "Paul! my son! my son!"

"Yes, mother, your son," murmured the duke, "rescued from the grave indeed!"

"Yes, yes! Once more I feel your heart beat against mine, mine that I thought to be broken! My son! my son!"

And Raoul de Puycadère? to whom this return from the grave meant life and freedom! At first, he was dazed and could scarce believe the testimony of his eyes. But now that he had gradually recovered his senses, he turned to the King of Navarre for an explanation.

"Sire, what means this? Who has wrought this miracle?"

"It is all due to the science of the greatest physician in Paris," said the king with a smile, indicating Master Pare.

"Tell us, tell us, Master Pare!" eagerly cried Gabrielle, in whose eyes was shining a happy light that had not been there for many a day.

The duchess raised her head, but still holding tight to her son, as if she did not dare to let him go.

"Yes! tell me! tell me!" she said. "Ah! I cannot speak. It is my joy that chokes me."

Thus conjured, the king's physician told his story.

"Pardon me, your grace," he began, "if I have dared to trifle with a mother's feelings and to endanger

others," with a glance at Raoul and Gabrielle, "but I did not dare to act before. When the body of the duke was intrusted to my care for interment, I saw, but saw with trembling doubt, a *sign* of life."

"And did not speak of it!" sighed the duchess. "Oh, it was cruel!"

"I dared not give the hope I scarcely felt, but, for all these long days, I watched and watched the faint spark as it hovered uncertain over the dark void, till at last the great change came. Madame, I give you back your son, my last cure and my best."

"But not the same," said the duke. "Thanks to this good man's skill and words of wisdom, I have been taught a lesson. Monsieur le Chevalier, to you I owe much. For all the trouble in which I have embroiled you, I ask your pardon."

And he held out his hand, which Raoul warmly grasped.

"Mother," continued the duke, "will you accept this gentleman as your friend and mine?"

"He has already found an advocate," replied the duchess, with a faint smile.

As she spoke, she withdrew her arms from her son and held them out to Gabrielle, who rushed into them with a glad cry.

At this moment, the attention of all was diverted by agonized shrieks of fear. Goujon was in the hands of the gypsies, who were treating him anything but gently.

The chevalier started forward.

"Let him go, my friends, let him go!" he exclaimed. "He is not worth your resentment!"

"Yes, let him go," added the King of Navarre, laughing. "The owl sings long, but he grows hoarse at last."

Much against their will, the Bohemians released their victim, and the poor wretch, with torn uniform and bleeding face, was allowed to slink away.

The king approached the soldiers, and with a few words dismissed them. The gypsies followed, with loud shouts of joy at the happy turn affairs had taken.

When Henri returned to the other end of the gallery he found the duchess sitting in a large armchair, with her son kneeling beside her. Behind them was the good physician, his kind, old face beaming with satisfaction.

A short distance away, Gabrielle nestled in Raoul's arms, her golden head pillowed on his breast.

As the king contemplated the group he laughed aloud, and for once there was nothing sneering in his laughter. It was an expression of pure delight.

"It seems a pity to break in upon your happiness," he said, "but there is something still to be added. I seem to have been the Merlin of your fairy tales, my Gascon, the wizard who unravels the tangled skeins and sets all things right. But there is left one other wave to my wand? Shall I work the transformation, Monsieur le Chevalier?"

"Surely, sire," replied Raoul, in some bewilderment.

"Monsieur le Chevalier de Puycadère," continued Henri of Navarre more gravely, "in addition to your other services, you saved my life. Whatever my enemies may say, ingratitude is not one of my faults. If I am not king here, I am king in Navarre! Cease to be my equerry and become governor of Béarn."

"Oh! sire!" broke simultaneously from Raoul and Gabrielle.

"You will leave for your new post to-morrow. I have procured from my brother of France this blank

pass to Navarre," drawing a parchment from his breast. "One of the names I have filled in, that of the loyal Gascon, Raoul, Chevalier de Puycadère."

The duchess rose and held out her hand for the document.

"With your Majesty's permission, I will dare to write the other," she said. "That of Gabrielle de Vrissac—or shall it be Gabrielle de Puycadère!"

. . . . . .

Fifteen years have elapsed.

Both Charles IX. and Catherine de Medicis are dead. Henri de Bourbon, King of Navarre, is now Henri IV. King of France. Both he and his beautiful queen, Marguerite, the last representative of the House of Valois, have many years before them of a reign over the country they love, troublous years perhaps, and yet years of a prosperity which France has never known heretofore, and which will leave their stamp on generations still to come.

Many fierce battles have been fought, many struggles of diplomacy have taken place, but these only interest us so far as the people whose fortunes we have followed are concerned.

At the intercession, or rather at the command, of the Italian queen-mother, the conspirators who sought the life of the King of Navarre, the Vicomte de Vrissac at their head, were pardoned, on the condition that they left France forever.

Annibal Goujon, disappointed in the reward of five hundred crowns for the capture of the Huguenot he thought himself so sure to win, died of the result of a drunken bout, indulged in through his disappointment. And—do we dare to whisper it?—his wife did not mourn him extravagantly.

Pretty Rose never married again—one experience was enough for her—but the "Rising Sun" prospered year after year, bringing a golden shower into her lap.

One more scene and then the curtain falls.

We are where we were when we first met Raoul de Puycadère, but how changed are our surroundings.

The ruined château is now restored and is the pride of the whole countryside. The house itself is magnificent, both inside and outside, the lawns are smooth as velvet, the gardens brilliant in their riot of color, and the owner and his beautiful wife are adored throughout the fair land of Gascony.

Let us take our last glimpse of them on one exquisite evening of the last days of summer.

Under the spreading branches of a tilleul-tree sit Raoul de Puycadère and his wife, Gabrielle far more lovely, if possible, as a matron than she ever was as a maid.

Not far away is a white-haired old lady, bent with years now, but with her wit as keen, her personality as strong as it has ever been, and, by her side, the duke, her son, who, although a Catholic, has won his spurs and redeemed the follies of his youth fighting the battles of his country with the white plume of Navarre as his oriflamme.

From the lawn below come the shouts of laughter of two sturdy sons of the house of Puycadère, who are being taught by a dark-eyed gypsy matron the words of the song of their country:

"Non loin du pays de Gascogne,
Mon père avait un vieux château.
Mon aïeuel était rossignol,
Ma grand-mère était hirondelle!"

It is not often that those nomadic personages, Pharos and his wife, Mirza, can be induced to come for a visit to the Château de Puycadère, but, when they can, what delight to the two boys, whom they love almost as much as do their parents!

Gabrielle turns to her husband, who remains still her lover, and, glancing over the sunlit scene before her, says:

"How happy we are! Mordiou!" and then she laughs: "You see, I am becoming as much a Gascon as you!"

Raoul laughs too.

"Become a Gascon as much as you please in all ways but one. Don't indulge in the sole weakness of the Gascon, and romance! I must believe in your love."

Gabrielle turns upon him her eyes, full of that light that never was on land or sea.

"Do you doubt it?"

"Never, sweetheart, never!"

THE END.

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